

L. G. Pears

with kindest regards,

from

the Author

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THE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM

THE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM

BY

HENRY D. A. MAJOR, M.A.

RECTOR OF COPGROVE,
VICE-PRINCIPAL OF RIPON CLERGY COLLEGE,
EDITOR OF "THE MODERN CHURCHMAN."

"The plague of the Church for above a thousand years
has been the enlarging our Creed and making more
fundamentals than God ever madē."—RICHARD BAXTER.

"The more complex the Creed,
the more it obscures the Christ."

BISHOP OF CARLISLE.

T. FISHER UNWIN
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OMNIBUS COLLEGII RIPONENSIS DISCIPULIS,
QUI OPERAM STUDIUMQUE IN LITERAS SACRAS
VERE RECTEQUE CONFERUNT,
OBSERVANTIAE ERGO BENEVOLENTIAEQUE
DEDICO.

PREFACE

ANY acute and impartial observer of the Church of England at the present time can hardly fail to observe the growing conflict of ideals within her borders. It is not as some might suppose, with the party-cries of last century ringing in their ears, a conflict between the Anglo-Catholic and the Evangelical ideals. That issue is practically dead. The present conflict is between traditional Christianity (whether Anglo-Catholic or Evangelical) and modern Christianity—a conflict of those who identify Christianity with certain traditional forms and institutions, intellectual conceptions, and disputable historical occurrences, as against those who refuse to identify Christianity with aught else except the spiritual and moral ideals of the Saviour. It would be unjust to maintain, as is sometimes done, that this conflict is one between creed and character, or between orthodoxy and conduct ; for the Christian faith in so far as it is a moral and spiritual stimulus is held with equal force by both sides, and there is no obvious difference between their moral standards.

Not the least significant issue fought out at the Reformation was that between those who regarded the Bible as the supreme authority in matters of faith, and those who elevated ecclesiastical tradition to a place of equal authority with the Bible. So in this present conflict, the vital issue is really between those who regard the Spirit of Christ as the supreme authority, and those who wish to elevate traditional dogmas, practices, and organisations to an equality with it.

And, as in the Reformation conflict, the Church of England, while claiming the supreme authority for Holy Scripture, did not fail to allow, in contrast to the Puritan extremists, a certain subsidiary value to ecclesiastical tradition, so those in the Church of England to-day who claim the supreme authority for the Spirit of Christ are ready to concede not only the need for dogmas, organisations, institutions, and practices, but even the great usefulness of many existing ones, on condition of course that they are kept in due subordination to the Spirit of Christ. Inasmuch as this present conflict has in no small degree originated in the atmosphere of the Universities, for it is in one of its aspects a conflict of educational levels, it might be supposed that it is purely academic, and may therefore be ignored by the practical Christian.

Such a view would be as profound a mistake as to regard the fourth century conflict between

the orthodox and the Arians as merely a conflict about an iota—as Gibbon stigmatised it—instead of a conflict involving the profoundest consequences both for the Church and for the world. It is hardly too much to say that if the protagonists for the supreme authority of the Spirit of Christ can convince the Church of the rightness of their position to-day, they will not only be the means of transforming organised Christianity, but will also be the means of rendering organised Christianity vastly more capable of transforming the world than it is at present.

Although this conflict within the Church is due to different educational levels, and is the natural outcome of the weakening of the position of traditional Christianity by modern advances in scientific and historical knowledge, yet it is as much a moral and spiritual conflict as it is an intellectual one. The Churchman who finds his traditional Christianity shattered by modern views, does not become a modern Churchman in consequence. Probably in nine cases out of ten he becomes an indifferent Churchman, and if he remains a Churchman at all, is a Churchman only in name. For him the claims of the Church upon his faith and duty are at an end. He may continue to regard her as a picturesque institution, or as a useful bulwark against Socialism, or as an energetic Poor Relief Agency, or as an enthusiastic provider of popular and

innocent entertainments, or he may think that the State ought to take her place and property as quickly and as quietly as it can ; but what he has entirely ceased to do is to regard the Church as a spiritual society, bearing, even though it be in earthen vessels, the Gospel of Life. Thus it follows that the indifferent Churchman may ignore the Church, or patronise her, or even detest her, but he has no real belief in her undying mission and in his duty to assist her to carry it out.

The modern Churchman, on the other hand, is not simply a Churchman with modern views, but one who believes that he has in consequence a special duty to the Church. That duty is to enable her to adapt her teaching and organisation and methods to the conditions of modern life. It is the effort to discharge this duty which brings him into acute conflict with the traditional Churchman, and sometimes even with the indifferent Churchman, for the latter in the hour of battle, if he fights at all, is often more ready, for political or social reasons, to range himself with the traditionalist than against him.

On the Continent at the present time it is no uncommon thing to find avowed atheists fighting under the banners of clericalism against religious modernism. It is therefore not merely his intellectual outlook, but his sense of moral and spiritual obligation to the Church, which

characterises the modern Churchman and renders him in the eyes of his opponents a "troubler of Israel." The modern Churchman sees quite clearly that reformation, re-adjustment, adaptation are absolutely necessary if the Church is to do her duty by the nation. This, the traditional Churchman will not allow, and he regards the modern Churchman's efforts in this direction as traitorous. If the Christian citadel is to be effectively defended, the old-style must be replaced by the new-style fortifications, and the modern Churchman is anxious to persuade his traditional brother to abandon the old-style fortifications, and if needs be, to blow them up. Destructive criticism, he asserts, has undermined them, and they can only come tumbling down on the heads of their defenders. The reply of his traditional brother is to denounce him as a traitor, deprive him of command, and, if possible, drive him from the camp. However, when the defenders of the old-style fortifications have died amid their ruins, the traditional Churchman will not trouble to re-build the fortifications in the old style, but will adopt the new style, though without acknowledgment to his modern brother. Thus the bulwarks of Zion are builded and her warfare accomplished. To-day his own plan of campaign seems to the modern Churchman to be perfectly clear, absolutely needful, and entirely Christian, but to

his traditional brother it is treason and heresy. However, it may be well to outline it here.

When the modern Churchman scrutinizes the Christian religion, six aspects of it are conspicuous—the moral, social, spiritual, dogmatic, institutional, and miraculous.

These aspects fall roughly into two classes. In the first class are the moral, social and spiritual, and in the second class are the dogmatic, institutional, and miraculous.

The adherents of traditional Christianity act as though the last three are of supreme importance, while the adherents of modern Christianity assert that it is the first three, and that a searching and unprejudiced investigation of the history of Christianity proves this to be the case.

It is, so the modern Churchman asserts, the treatment of the dogmatic, institutional, and miraculous as of the essence of the Christian religion which hampers its power of appeal and limits its influence among modern men—"the men who are being moulded by the forces of to-morrow." Because of this wrong method, due to a fundamental misconception, the inability to distinguish between the essential and the secondary, the time of the Christian teacher is being wasted, his work impeded, his religion despised, his efforts too often rendered fruitless. In the Christian camp itself, arid and bitter disputes arise about historical details and theo-

logical phraseology ; ecclesiastical divisions are intensified by differences about Church organisation and custom ; the proper moral and spiritual work of the Church is neglected ; good men are repelled from her ministry and membership ; and all because of this wrong and false emphasis upon the dogmatic, institutional, and miraculous aspects of the Christian religion.

For the modern Churchman the *dogmatic* aspect of Christianity is merely the philosophical and legal—but not necessarily infallible—formulation of Christian religious experience.

If a man has the spiritual experience, it matters little whether he formulates it at all in words, providing he exhibits it in life and action. Or what matters it if his phraseology be new when trying to express this religious experience ? The very newness of the phraseology may help to quicken this spiritual experience in the lives of others, which the old phrases and terms had failed to awaken.

For the modern Churchman, the *institutional* aspect of Christianity—the mechanism of rite and organisation—is a means through which the Divine Spirit operates on human souls. Helpful indeed for the preservation and propagation of moral and spiritual ideals ; helpful, too, in making the Spirit's operation real for some who otherwise might be unable to realise His Presence ; but by no means the only mechanism

which the Spirit uses; and for some personalities certainly less effective than other modes of operation. But in any case this ecclesiastical mechanism does not appear to the modern Churchman to be of the essence of the Christian religion, and certainly it is not and ought not to be so fixed in form as to be incapable of varied adaptation where and when human need demands it.

The attitude of the modern Churchman towards the *miraculous* aspect of Christianity is equally clear. He may not, unless he feels that he has a grip of science, metaphysic, and history, which is vouchsafed to few, decide conclusively that miracles do not happen, and that there are very good reasons why they should not happen. He may not consider it of any great moment that he should make up his mind on that point at present, any more than on many other historical, scientific, and metaphysical problems. What, however, he sees quite clearly is this, that for an increasing number of philosophers, scientists, and historians, the miraculous aspect of Christianity, if it be insisted on by the Church as an essential aspect of Christianity, is a hindrance and not a help to the acceptance of the Christian religion. On the other hand, he recognises with equal clearness that for a large number of traditional Christians, what is called "the miraculous" in

Jewish and Christian history, is for them the supreme evidence of God's working in human affairs. Without the miraculous, they cannot believe in a living God, Who hears prayer and Who expresses Himself in and through human personalities, and supremely in Jesus Christ.

They cannot conceive of an effective and authoritative Divine Revelation made by a non-miraculous mode of operation. Apparently they can neither recognise nor receive such Revelation as divine. The modern Churchman sees the difficulties of both parties, and he sees where the solution lies. Each party believes in the *fact* that the Christian religion enshrines a supreme revelation of the nature and will of God in Christ, but each differs as to the *mode* in which that revelation has been made. He would urge therefore that so long as they are agreed as to the essential question, *the fact of the revelation*, they ought to be free to differ about the non-essential question, *the mode of the revelation*. The mode of the Divine Revelation, whether miraculous or non-miraculous, is no more of the essence of Christianity than is the mode of creation. For nearly nineteen centuries the Church held the traditional view that the method of creation was by a series of instantaneous Divine acts, now its chief theologians hold that it is by the method of a Divine evolutionary process. But the Church to-day contains

men who hold both views, and each class is recognised as equally orthodox, though possibly not each as equally intelligent. It took a generation of painful wrangling to achieve this measure of freedom. Surely it ought to take less time to decide in favour of the view that those who hold the non-miraculous mode of Divine Revelation are equally orthodox with those who hold the miraculous mode of Divine Revelation, and that in any case the mode is a subject for investigation primarily by historians, physical scientists, and metaphysicians, and that ultimately their decision, whatever it may be, must be final. This being the case, the exponent of modern Christianity urges that if the Christian religion is to be presented in such a way as to appeal to the modern world, it is upon the moral, social, and spiritual aspects of that religion that the emphasis must be placed in the Church's formularies, preaching, and practice.

It is the power of Christianity to provide the most perfect form of culture for the human spirit, whether of king or ploughman, professor or child; its power to elevate and ennoble social and civic life by furnishing them with ideals which, as they are progressively realised, promise more and more convincingly the highest type of civilisation, which will alone render the modern man a convinced Christian.

It is true that the promulgation of these ideals

has much to contend with in human sloth, sensuality, selfishness, ignorance, and folly; but when once the Christian Church with its enormous resources can be won to see the absolute necessity of concentrating its forces upon the promulgation of these moral, social, and spiritual ideals which are its peculiar treasure, enormous strides forward will be made.

At present, however, the forces of the Christian Church are being very largely dissipated by contentions about, and contendings for, its dogmatic, institutional, and miraculous aspects, which have little interest for, and little influence on, the normal, modern man. It is, of course, no easy matter in the Church of England to transfer the emphasis from the dogmatic, institutional, and miraculous to the moral, social, and spiritual, but it must be done if the Church is to become the centre of light and influence in the nation.

The writer of this little book can see not a few indications to-day of this transfer of emphasis being made unconsciously, and in other cases of its being made deliberately but not obviously. Of course, it is primarily the duty of the clergy to make it, but the key of the position is held by the authorities in the theological colleges, perhaps even more than by the bishops. The task of enabling the Church to change her front in the face of this present crisis can be achieved

by them, if they have the insight to perceive the need, and the courage and good-will to attempt it. Education must precede reformation. The ideal method is to begin by educating the future leaders, and then they can educate those whom it is their duty to lead, otherwise disaffection, and possibly revolution, must ensue.

The writer, who for the last seven years has been a theological college tutor, is convinced that an ordinand need become a no less earnest and efficient clergyman because he does not regard the dogmas of the Church as infallible and eternal, her formularies as unalterable, her organisation as fixed for every age and clime, her conception of the divine modes of operation as incapable of expansion and adjustment. A belief in infallible dogmas, fixed institutions, miraculous methods, does not necessarily avail anything; it is the Spirit of Christ manifested in human personalities which really avails, and this is not tied down to any particular institutions, formularies, or modes of thought; but to give the modern man the impression that the Spirit of Christ is so confined is to repel him from the Christian religion. Fixed institutions, infallible dogmas, miraculous methods will appeal to the traditionalist, just as "signs" and circumcision did to the Jew in St Paul's day. On the other hand, adaptable institutions, re-statable dogmas, non-miraculous methods

will appeal to the modern-minded type of man, just as "wisdom" did to the Greek. But in any case it is not the dogmas, institutions and miracles, but what they express and symbolise: the reality which produced them, the Divine Life manifested in Christ which they seem to reflect and explain and propagate, that is of importance, and where that Life and Spirit are, whatever be the form of the society or the intellectual expression which enshrines and transmits them, there, all is well.

What concerns all modern Churchmen is lest certain of the Church of England authorities in their well-meant efforts to defend traditional Christianity by the exclusion of modern Churchmen from the ministry, should only succeed in eliminating the Greek without even benefiting the Jew.

If there is no place for the modern-minded man in the ministry of the National Church, and it is an open question as to how far this is the case at present, there is not the slightest doubt that the modern-minded laity—as is also notoriously the case at present—will cease to retain any sense of duty towards the National Church, and will in proportion as they are moral and religious seek to use other institutions to discharge what are properly her functions, with consequences to the Church on which there is no need to dwell.

The Religion of Christ—owing in some measure to its Semetic and Hellenic affinities—is a religion both of redemption and of illumination. It needs to justify both these aspects of itself to-day.

Its redemptive power must be manifested in its ability to redeem the individual from sinful habits and low ideals by bringing him into living communion with God—as revealed in Jesus Christ—the perennial source of moral vigour and spiritual life. Its illuminating power must be manifested in its reverence for truth and freedom, and in its abhorrence of falsehood, bigotry, formalism, suppression and the devious devices of ecclesiastical diplomacy. It must give men the impression that for it, love, truth, freedom, courage, joy, are the great things; and dogma, tradition, organisation, ritual, institutionalism, the small ones.

“Weary of all this wordy strife,
These notions, forms, and modes, and names,
To Thee, the Way, the Truth, the Life,
Whose love my simple heart inflames,
Divinely taught at last I fly,
With Thee and Thine to live and die.

“Forth from the midst of Babel brought,
Parties and sects I cast behind:
Enlarged my heart, and freed my thought,
Where'er the latent truth I find,
The latent truth with joy to own,
And bow to Jesus' Name alone.”

These are the ideals which the writer would desire to see more generally taught in the Church of England to-day, especially in her theological colleges, and he hopes that this little volume will be found in some measure to reflect these ideals, both in its spirit and contents.

The papers which compose it were prepared originally for theological students seeking Holy Orders in the Church of England, and they bear the marks of their origin. This will explain, and perhaps excuse, their didactic and hortatory tone. It will also explain why they look out on the world from the standpoint of a Church of England clergyman—a standpoint which, although well defined, need be neither narrow nor unsympathetic.

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CLERGY COLLEGE, RIPON,
Whitsuntide, 1912.

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I

THE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM

SYNOPSIS

- I. The Epistle to the Galatians re-asserts the Gospel of Freedom which Christ proclaimed. The nature of this freedom.
- II. The Gospel of Freedom demands from the Individual Christian a high degree of personal responsibility, education, and self-control.
- III. The Gospel of Freedom, by giving scope to the Spirit of Truth, endows the Christian Church with the power of progress, influence, and comprehensiveness.
- IV. The Gospel of Freedom is easily lost, obscured, and perverted.

I

THE GOSPEL OF FREEDOM

I

EACH of St Paul's epistles strikes a great keynote of the Christian life. For instance, that to the Romans, "Justification by Faith"; that to the Colossians, "Christ the Head of Creation"; that to the Ephesians, "All mankind made one in Christ's Church"; that to the Galatians, "Freedom in the Spirit."

English Churchmen have pointed with pride to the Magna Charta, because it contains these words, "The Church of England shall be free"; with a gladness even more triumphant the Christian may point to the Epistle to the Galatians, for therein is written in "large letters"¹ indeed the Charter of Christian freedom. "The Jerusalem which is above is free."²

It is because the Epistle to the Galatians declares so unmistakably that the religion of

¹ *Gal.* v. 11.

² *Gal.* iv. 26.

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Christ is the religion of freedom that Martin Luther, the great champion of freedom against both Papal tyranny and legal bondage, said of it: "The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle; I have betrothed myself to it, it is my wife."

But although St Paul was the first and greatest of those whom St Irenaeus rightly calls "the apostles of freedom," "*Qui veritatis fuerunt praedicatores et apostoli libertatis*,"¹ yet was he not the original discoverer of it. It was St Paul's Master, the Head of the Church, who gave her the gift of freedom. This St Paul himself asserts in this very epistle: "With freedom did Christ set us free."²

Christ is the Liberator of mankind—and that in a three-fold sense.

He frees men from sin and the chain of sinful habits by bringing them into filial relationship to God.

He frees them from fear—fear of death and fear of Nature—by teaching them that all these things are in His Father's hand.

He frees them from slavery to legal observances, by giving them the free life of the Spirit. It is with the last kind of freedom—freedom from legalism—that we are here concerned.

We have but to recall portions of our Lord's life to see very clearly that He was the Liberator from legalism. He abolished the legal distinc-

¹ Iren. *Adv. Haer.*, Bk. iii. ch. xv.

² *Gal.* v. 1.

tion between clean and unclean meats when He said : “ It is not that which goeth into the man which defileth the man.” He abolished ceremonial purifications and all the vast body of Rabbinical ordinances when He said that they were not the Divine law but merely “ the commandments of men.”¹ He freed men from the burden of the Sabbath and all its hedge of regulations when He said : “ The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” He weakened the authority of the whole sacrificial system of Judaism when He reiterated the prophet’s assertion that God desired loving kindness and not sacrifice. He refused to make fasting a permanent feature of the Christian life when He said “ new wine ”—the new wine of Gospel grace and freedom—could not be put into the old wine-skins of existing Jewish ordinances. He delivered men from the burden of all local and external worship when He said : “ Woman, believe me the hour cometh when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem shall ye worship the Father. God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth.”

It would be possible to discover our Lord’s attitude towards legal and ceremonial observances by approaching the subject from another side, namely, by asking, “ Do legalism and ceremonialism form part of His conception of the Kingdom of God ? ” Frankly, they do not.

¹ *Mark vii. 7.*

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Membership of the Kingdom, continuance in the Kingdom, and the possession of the joy of the Kingdom do not necessitate—if our Lord's teaching on the subject be examined—any ceremonial or legal observances. The attitude of the heart towards God, the man's conduct towards his fellow-men, mark him as the son of the Kingdom. They are the final test and nothing else. Thus St Paul, when declaring to the Galatians the law of liberty, was but loyally and bravely re-echoing the teaching of His Master, the Lord of liberty.

Now, if the history of the Church has any great lessons to teach us, and it has many, surely this is one of them, that there is a great danger of our forgetting this fundamental truth of the Gospel. One indeed which great parts of Christ's Church have forgotten. One which even we of the English Church are apt to forget when we fight fiercely for ordinances and cling tenaciously to them, declaring that if the Church parts with any or all of them she will thereby lose her character as part of the Church of Christ. If we do this, are we not forgetting that the religion of Christ is not a ceremonial religion? Are we not forgetting that we are children of the Jerusalem above which is free? Bishop Lightfoot, probably the most learned and certainly one of the most cautiously accurate of our bishops, wrote these words: "The Kingdom of Christ, not being a kingdom of this world,

is not limited by the restrictions which fetter other societies, political or religious. It is in the fullest sense free, comprehensive, universal. . . . It has no sacred days or seasons, no special sanctuaries, because every time and place alike are holy. Above all, it has no sacerdotal system. . . . This, then, is the Christian ideal; a holy season extending the whole year round—a temple confined only by the limits of the habitable world—a priesthood co-extensive with the human race.”¹

Of course, it may be said, we all know that the Christian religion is not bound by the Jewish ceremonial law, nor is it required to use any Jewish ordinances, but surely we are bound to use and to retain our Christian institutions and ordinances. Mark the answer. We may retain them—we shall no doubt be wise if we do retain them. Indeed there is not one of them as generally practised which the writer of these words would willingly abolish—but we are not *bound* to retain them. They are not of the essence of the Gospel. That was Bishop Lightfoot’s opinion. He tells us that the apostles’ “language is not satisfied by supposing that they condemned only the temple worship in one case, and that they reprobated only Jewish Sabbaths and new moons in the other. It was against the false principle that they waged war; the principle which exalted the means

¹ *Essay on the Christian Ministry*, pp. 181-4.

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into an end, and gave an absolute intrinsic value to subordinate aids and expedients . . . They were no part of the essence of God's message to man in the Gospel. . . . The Gospel is not a code of positive ordinances, but conformity to a perfect exemplar, incorporation into a divine life."¹

Or, as a great German teacher, who in learning is not second even to Lightfoot, has finely expressed it: "The Christian religion is something simple and sublime; it means one thing and one thing only: Eternal life lived in the midst of time, by the strength and under the eyes of God."²

II

Now, how does this Gospel of Freedom bear upon the individual Christian and his duty?

(1) The Gospel of Freedom demands especially three qualifications from him. First, it demands a great increase in his sense of *responsibility*. The slave life, whilst it deprives a man of freedom, deprives him also of a strong, far-sighted sense of responsibility. Slaves are notoriously lacking in responsibility, but freedom demands responsibility from him who would be free. The free man's life is not guided by the petty rules and regulations of a master. He

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 184.

² A. Harnack, *What is Christianity?* p. 8.

may employ his time and energy as he will. But his very life and its success depend upon how he does this. His life is higher and nobler as a free man, but it is also much more precarious. His freedom demands from him a higher degree of responsibility. Thus it is always with the Christian ; he realises that he is not under the law but under grace ; he realises that there are for him no regulations imposed by any external authority or requiring his absolute obedience. Sacred times, sacred places, sacred ministries, sacred ordinances he is free to use or to discard. If he use them he is free to use them in whatever way he will. He can say of them with St Paul : "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any." Theoretically, he is free to reject them all. Practically, however, he cannot do without them in some form or other. Hence he has on his own responsibility to select those that will best help him to live like a child of God, and in selecting them, he will, as one who has love in his heart, think not simply of himself but of his brethren as well ; moreover, as one who is wise, he will be willing in some measure to be guided by the experience of the Christian ages as well as by his own. To make a choice, as may easily be perceived, is a very responsible and difficult undertaking. Instead now of finding his road by means of sign-boards and street notices, it will

be a case of doing it by the compass and the stars. The compass is the Spirit of God in his heart ; the stars are the eternal principles of the Divine life revealed to man in the Gospel of the Lord. Young and irresponsible and uneducated people had better stick to the finger-posts for guidance ; but the older and more thoughtful, even if they still use the finger-posts—and they most probably will—should at least know how to lay down their course by the compass and the stars, because occasions arise in every life when journeys have to be taken, where there are no finger-posts and street notices, and how shall he who has never learnt to do without them make his journey then, or above all act as a guide to others ? Mr Feeble-mind and Mr Ready-to-Halt may use the finger-posts, but Mr Interpreter, Mr Great-Heart, and Mr Valiant-for-Truth must be able to find their way to the Celestial City without them. Indeed, no Christian who cannot do this, and who does not live in the spirit of one who can do this, has fully realised the perfect freedom and so also the vast responsibility of the Christian calling.

(2) The second qualification which is demanded is *education*. The Gospel of Freedom demands a much higher degree of education from the Christian than does a legal system. By education one does not mean—simply or at all—book-learning, neither does one mean a great body of detailed knowledge, but the power of thinking

clearly—the power of moral and spiritual judgment—the ability to judge between the true and the false, the accidental and the permanent, the form and the essence. Let us take an illustration from political life. We should probably allow that the extension of our political franchise ought to be based upon the qualification of education in its widest sense. Before granting the franchise we should rightly ask whether those who demand it have the education and therefore the judgment requisite for making a right use of it.

So, too, with the Christian, if he is to possess and rightly use the franchise—the freedom of the child of God—he must have education. Plato defined education as “the turning of the soul to the light.” That is the education necessary for Christian freedom. It consists in “enlightenment,” the enlightenment given by being brought into the presence of Him who is “the Light of the World.” This enlightenment enables a man to understand and receive the greater principles of Christ’s teaching. It enables him to guide the whole course of his life by those principles. Our Lord gave no laws or regulations. He taught a few great principles ; He warned men what lusts and tempers and conditions would hinder the practice of these great principles ; and He gave various examples of their application—that is, of the kind of action which the practice of those principles would demand from His followers in

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the age and the circumstances in which they were then placed. These circumstances are often entirely different to-day. Indeed, they keep on changing for every age, and so therefore does the form which the application of Christ's principles must take. For instance, to-day in England, Christ's principle of love to our fellow-man bids us refuse money to him who begs from us in the streets. In the first century in Palestine, Christ bids His followers to give to such an one. But he only truly obeys Christ whose action, whether he withhold or whether he give, is influenced purely by his love for his fellow-man. And it will require education—knowledge of Christ's principles ; knowledge of his fellow-man ; knowledge, too, of his own heart ; that it does not allow him to decide that the decision which it is perhaps easiest for him to make is the right one. Thus, while the moral and spiritual qualities which the Gospel demands remain ever the same, the practice of them will assume varied and sometimes even apparently contradictory forms.

(3) The third qualification which the freedom of the Gospel demands is *self-control*. The Gospel of Freedom, in addition to demanding a high sense of responsibility, and a high standard of education, demands also a high degree of self-control. We know the dangers of sudden emancipation. The slave has no self-control, as soon as he is freed he rushes into various excesses. His life has been entirely guided by external control,

hence he has never developed any inner control. It is at this stage that a wise system of law is of the greatest benefit—a system of law which allows a steadily increasing measure of freedom to those who learn thereby to make a wise use of it. The laws of Israel served, as we know, this great purpose in the nation's history. They developed the national conscience, and side by side with it, they developed the spirit of discipline—the power of self-control. They taught Israel that great principle enshrined in *Psalm* cxix., “There is life in obedience.”

Where they differed from the Gospel, however, was that they meant by the declaration “There is life in obedience,” that there is life in obedience to the Jewish law; whereas the Christian means when he declares that “There is life in obedience,” that there is life in obedience to the Spirit of Christ.

A man may be saved without law, but he cannot be saved without obedience. To think that he can is to confuse license with liberty—license, which is freedom to do what we like, with liberty, which is freedom to do what we ought. The greatest of modern philosophers taught that the moral law is binding upon all rational beings, and that therefore obedience to it is the duty of all mankind. But the obedience may be a free obedience or it may be a slavish obedience. It is free—indeed, it is a service which is perfect freedom—when it is obedience

to a principle of our nature, and is approved of and imposed upon himself by the man himself ; it is slavish when the law is imposed from outside, without the man's whole-hearted concurrence. In such a case, obedience becomes a merely external matter. This kind of obedience is apt to breed self-righteousness, formalism, and hypocrisy, because it is not an obedience which is the outcome of the man's whole nature—body, mind, and spirit. It was this kind of obedience which Christ condemned in the Pharisees. It was the defect of that law which St Paul declared could never save a man, that it produced this kind of obedience. Besides, God demands character—and obedience to ordinances can never give that—that springs from the heart and is nourished by the whole life.

Hence, no written law, no code of regulations, no ordinances or institutions demand the Christian's absolute obedience. The Christian is saved by obedience to the Spirit of God, obedience to the principles of the Divine life manifested in the teaching and Person of Christ, obedience to the higher Christlike nature which man himself possesses, because he is made in the image of God.

And so the Gospel of Freedom calls to the man who lives as the slave instead of as the master of ordinances, and says to him : “ Friend, come up higher ” ; “ Receive the glorious liberty of the children of God ” ; but at the same time it adds

a solemn warning : “ Friend, unless you have a deep sense of the responsibility which the acceptance of my invitation involves ; unless you have that knowledge of Gospel principles which it demands ; unless you have that disciplined spirit of obedience, which is absolutely necessary, you had better remain a slave, for it is better to be a slave than a reprobate ; it is better not to accept the invitation than, having accepted it, to be cast out as a libertine, bound hand and foot, into outer darkness. But if you do not accept the invitation, then, in St Paul’s words, ‘ Christ shall profit you nothing ’ ; you are a son of the Jerusalem which is in bondage with her children ; you are not a son of the Jerusalem which is above and is free.”

III

That is what the Gospel of Freedom means for the individual Christian, but we are not merely individuals, we are members of a body—the Church of Christ. What, then, does the Gospel of Freedom mean for the Church of Christ ?

The vision of what the spirit of freedom in the Church has done for her, and might yet do for her, can only be touched on here. If her message and her methods and her ministers were permeated by it, it would give her a power of progress, of influence, of universality, of vitality, too great to estimate.

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Observe for a moment how it would increase her *power of progress*. The late Principal Story, of Glasgow, wrote on one occasion: "The very breath of intellectual life is freedom—freedom to search, to inquire, to discover, and to declare whatever it believes to be true. If inquiry in every other region of thought is free, and in theology is fettered, then the inevitable result is that while all other sciences progress, theology stands still." The Church is not only the bearer of the Gospel of Freedom; she is also the servant of the Kingdom of the Truth. Truth and Freedom are bound closely together. The Fourth Gospel records a saying of our Lord: "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

In our European history, some of the greatest fights for freedom have been fights for truth. The Reformation is the most notable example of this. It was because there was a great advance in the knowledge of the truth in the dawn of the Reformation period that therefore a great fight for freedom followed—and no small disorder. But as the judicious Hooker remarks—"Abusus non usum tollit"—an inalienable right may not be taken away because it is liable to misuse.

This age is not dissimilar to that of the Reformation period. There has been a great advance—how great some of us hardly realise—in the knowledge of the truth. A steady though not always visible fight has been proceeding on

its behalf, and is likely to grow in intensity as the age advances. Much has already been won in our own branch of the Church, although we have not yet put into the Calendar of her saints and martyrs the men who lost their reputations and positions to win it. For instance, the doctrine of a local, material, and everlasting fiery hell, has yielded and been slain by the fighters for truth in our own age. The doctrine of the atonement which proclaimed it as a propitiatory sacrifice offered to an angry God, has also fled before the truth from our pulpits. The belief in the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture is also steadily retreating before its advance. But this is not only the battle of truth ; it is also the battle of freedom. These victories have freed English Churchmen from the doubt and difficulty of believing in doctrines which are an offence both to their intelligence and to their moral sense. An utterance of Dr J. E. M'Taggart illustrates this : “ . . . the Christianity of sixty years ago, while no doubt such that many men could honestly believe it to be true, was such that no man could *wish* it to be true, unless he was devoid either of imagination or of humanity.”¹

Moreover, just as freedom is the only atmosphere in which truth can flourish, so the right to know and to do the truth is the only liberty which the Gospel of Freedom claims. Truth—which is the unveiling of the will and nature of

¹ *Dare to be Wise*, p. 13.

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God — is the only orthodoxy which freedom knows; and obedience to the truth her supreme duty. It is because this is so, that freedom and order, when each has truth as its ideal and love as its guide, are not enemies but friends. Where truth and love are united, there also freedom and order are united; that, however, is on no low level, but

“ . . . close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God Himself is moon and sun.”

And so, as our apprehension of truth is a growing thing, so also is obedience to the truth a growing thing. Hence that spirit of freedom in the Church which teaches the duty of free growth in the truth will also provide the Church with the right form of message for every age, and thus render her a living, moving, growing, learning, as well as a teaching, Church.

But power of progress means *power of influence*. This also will the spirit of freedom give to the Church in increasing measure. It is said, that what mankind is concerned about, is not “What is truth?” but “What is trumps?” This is a calumny. All earnest men are like the pilgrims at Vanity Fair, who, when asked what they would buy, said: “Sirs, we will buy the truth.” When men believe that the Church has got the truth to tell them and that all her teachers are free to utter it, they will listen to her and believe her in larger measure than at present. In

many cases the Church's message has fallen on dull ears and irresponsive hearts, because of the out-of-date and so misleading form in which that message was presented, due too often to the lack of freedom both to investigate and to utter the truth unless it seemed in harmony with the norm of orthodoxy. Such limitations were of less consequence in ages of ignorance and authority, than in an age which demands of its teachers both knowledge and power (*δύναμις* not *ἐξουσία*). New truth must often seem unorthodox and excite hostility, for, as the poet tells us :—

“New truth makes ancient good uncouth.”

But it is a pity to discountenance its utterance on that account, for in time truth heals the wounds she gives, and error—so the history of science shows—stands much less chance of surviving in an atmosphere of freedom than in one of suppression. This is easily understood, for if where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty, then where there is no liberty His Presence must be excluded. Thus the spirit of freedom which enables the Church to teach *non nova sed nove*, will do not a little to increase her influence as a teacher of moral and spiritual ideals united to historic truth.

“And so the Word had breath, and wrought
With human hands the creed of creeds
In loveliness of perfect deeds
More strong than all poetic thought.”

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The spirit of freedom within the Church will also give her greater *power of comprehensiveness*, and so provide a means of reunion.

The Lambeth Conference laid down four conditions for Re-union. It is not the Lambeth Quadrilateral which will of itself bring about re-union ; it is the growth among Christians of something which was also conspicuous at the last meeting of the Conference—the triune spirit of freedom, truth, and love. It is this and this alone, which will finally achieve the Re-union of Christendom. He who has within himself the spirit of freedom is willing to grant to others the same measure of freedom which he himself possesses. Thus the Church as she becomes imbued with the spirit of freedom will cease to demand rigid uniformity in creed and organisation. She will demand instead, oneness of purpose and ideal and nothing more than those great principles of faith and practice which are at once both the inspiration and the witness of this oneness of ideal and purpose. She will claim nothing more than “the unity of the Spirit”—and when she does this she will be infinitely nearer achieving uniformity in creed and organisation than she is at present—inasmuch as they who seek the Kingdom of God first and its righteousness have the lesser needful things added unto them, and they who are willing to make any great renunciation for the Kingdom of God’s sake, whether of houses or lands, or of not less beloved rigid intellectual

definitions, historical institutions, ordered ceremonial, may receive them back again, not less hallowed because they have first laid them on the altar of the Spirit of Love and Freedom. Thus the Church, as she becomes imbued with the spirit of freedom, will certainly demand no further conditions for re-union with herself than those which the Father and the Divine Son demand from mankind for communion with the Godhead. She will come to realise that if a fellow-Christian—by whatsoever name he may be called—enjoys the privilege of communion with God in Christ, and possesses a heart which is a shrine of the Holy Spirit, that he cannot possibly be unfit to have communion with any branch of the Church, and to share any privilege of love and fellowship which she can bestow on him.

Thus the growth of the spirit of freedom in the Church will make her Catholic indeed—truly comprehensive and universal.

IV

So noble and precious a spirit is worth cultivating in ourselves and in any branch of the Church to which we belong. The gift of freedom which our Lord gave to His followers may easily be lost. For one whom cowardice deprives of freedom, sloth deprives fifty. Humanly speaking, Christian freedom would have been lost in the first century if St Paul had not contended for it amid the most bitter persecution. Humanly

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speaking, it would not have been regained in England in the sixteenth century if Cranmer, Ridley, Latimer, and many others had not died for it at the stake. Are we to suppose that this age is entirely different? Can we not see the spirit of timorous slavery or of intolerant tyranny striving even to-day to hinder Church reform; attempting to take away from our National Church the ancient right of freedom which she claims "to ordain, change and abolish ceremonies or rites of the Church ordained only by man's authority"; judging of the duty of reform not on the ground of the benefit which it will bring in its train, but largely by whether it will be easy of achievement?

As Christians, we of the Reformed Churches especially, have a double reason for defending our freedom. We are free-born and we have also paid a great price for our freedom—or rather others have paid it for us. On the one hand, let us beware of using our liberty "as a cloak of maliciousness"¹ or "for an occasion to the flesh";² on the other hand, let us stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ has made us free, remembering ever that—"The Jerusalem which is above is free, which is our mother."³

"Home of hope and glory, Mother of the Free,
How shall they extol thee, who are born of thee
Wider still and wider may thy bounds be set,
God who made thee mighty, make thee mightier yet."

¹ 1 *Pet.* ii. 16.

² *Gal.* v. 13.

³ *Gal.* iv. 26.

II

THE PROPHEPIC SPIRIT

SYNOPSIS

To-day the prophetic aspect of the Christian Ministry is subordinated to the apostolic, priestly, pastoral ideals.

- I. Jesus was "the Prophet."
- II. Early Christian Order of Prophets.
- III. Spiritual prophecy does not necessarily involve the loss of self-consciousness ; the power of prediction ; and the apocalyptic outlook on the world.
- IV. The prophetic spirit is best studied in the moral and religious qualities of the prophets themselves : force, originality, courage, faith, personal holiness.
- V. Need for increased exercise of the prophetic function by the Ministry of to-day.
- VI. The prophetic function demands the entire concentration of the prophet's personality.

II

THE PROPHETIC SPIRIT

WE hear much to-day of the apostolic functions of the ministry—its directing, disciplinary, and conservative duties. We hear much to-day of the priestly functions of the ministry—its liturgical, symbolic, and representative acts performed in the name of the whole body of the faithful. We hear much to-day of the pastoral functions of the ministry—and of them we can never hear too much—the duty of shepherding the sheep, of tending with loving care the poor and ignorant and sinful, the serving with all humility of mind any who need our service.

But I think that we hardly hear enough to-day of the prophetic functions of the ministry. Indeed it often seems to be forgotten both in theory and practice that this is a function of the ministry at all. So much emphasis is placed upon the institutional and liturgical and pastoral—indeed in its lowest form upon the organising and financial—aspects of our ministry, that the

prophetic aspect is apt to be overlooked, or the catechetical is regarded as an adequate substitute for it. And yet if we must select one of these four functions—the apostolic, priestly, pastoral, prophetic—it is perhaps the prophetic which would best serve the Christian world to-day. Many of us are apt to connect prophecy almost entirely with Israel and the Old Testament. Prophecy is indeed their mystery and treasure, but it is equally the mystery and the treasure of the New Testament and of the Christian Church.

I

We know that our Lord was a prophet—how far He was an apocalyptic seer is another question. He was undoubtedly a prophet and on various occasions He spoke of Himself by that title. “A prophet is not without honour save in his native land,”¹ was His comment when His fellow townsmen were scandalised at Him. “It cannot be that a prophet should perish except in Jerusalem,”² was His ironic reply to the Pharisees, who hypocritically warned Him of the danger He was incurring by remaining in Peraea. Moreover, the world of His day recognised Him as a prophet, even before the Church—that little knot of disciples—recognised Him as the Messiah. “This is the prophet, Jesus, from

¹ *Mark*, vi. 4, and parallels.

² *Luke*, xiii. 33.

Nazareth of Galilee,"¹ was the explanation given by the multitude of Galilean pilgrims to the inhabitants of Jerusalem when our Lord entered that city in triumph. Indeed, even after the Church had recognised Him as the Messiah, elevated to the right hand of God, and shortly to come again in the clouds of heaven, it did not forget that He was a Prophet indeed, and so the early preachers of the Gospel proclaimed His Mission as the fulfilment of those words in Deuteronomy—"A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you from among your brethren."²

But perhaps it is not that we forget that our Lord was a prophet, but rather that we think of Him as having gathered up all prophecy into Himself, and so as having fulfilled and completed it. "The prophets bear witness to Him," we say, "and they end with Him." This impression has partly been given to us by those striking and beautiful words with which the Epistle to the Hebrews opens, "God who by divers portions and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." Moreover, this impression has been deepened by certain sayings uttered by our Lord Himself, *e.g.*, "All the prophets and the law prophesied until John,"³

¹ *Matt.* xxi. 11 ; cf. *Luke* xxiv. 19.

² *Deut.* xviii. 15 ; cf. *Acts* iii. 22, vii. 37.

³ *Matt.* xi. 13.

and especially by the parable of "The Wicked Husbandmen,"¹ in which the line of persecuted prophets is followed last of all by the Beloved Son. And yet if we think that prophecy ceased with our Lord we have forgotten that the Lord's Mission is typical of that of His servants. "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you."² Moreover the Lord Himself promised to send prophets to carry on His work. "Behold," said He, "I send unto you prophets . . . and some of them ye shall kill and crucify."³ This prediction was fulfilled. Prophecy became so general in the Apostolic Church, that the early Christians saw in the outpouring of the prophetic Spirit in those days, a fulfilment of the words of the prophet Joel. "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith the Lord, that I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, yea, and on my servants and on my hand-maidens in those days, will I pour forth of my Spirit, and they shall prophesy."⁴

II

Prophecy "appeared spontaneously wherever the Christian faith spread. We find prophets in the Churches of Jerusalem and Caesarea

¹ *Mark* xii. 1, f., and parallels in *Matt.* and *Luke*.

² *John* xx. 21.

³ *Matt.* xxiii. 34.

⁴ *Acts* ii. 17, 18.

among purely Christian Jewish Communities ; at Antioch where Jews and Gentiles mingled in Christian fellowship ; and everywhere throughout the Gentile Churches—in Rome, in Corinth, in Thessalonica, and in the Galatian Church. Prophets are mentioned by name in the New Testament writings—Agabus, Barnabas, Saul, Symeon Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, Judas, and Silas.”¹ Even women prophesied. Indeed so important was prophecy that in the ministries of the Apostolic Church, prophets ranked next to apostles. “First Apostles, secondly Prophets,”² writes St Paul. Nay, the very Church itself is said to be built upon the double foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the corner stone.³ How much of our New Testament literature is due to them is an interesting but intricate question.⁴ The one undoubted New Testament book by a Christian prophet is the Apocalypse of John, who makes constant reference in it to his brethren the prophets,⁵ and even gives us a new title for God, derived from the prophetic order—“The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets.”⁶ In short, we can see that the prophets were a most important order in the Apostolic Church, and the most important order in the sub-Apostolic Church. But where are they now ? History tells us that

¹ J. M. Lindsay, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, p. 91.

² 1 Cor. xii. 28 ; Eph. iv. 11.

³ Eph. ii. 20.

⁴ See E. C. Selwyn, *The Christian Prophets*.

⁵ Rev. xxii. 9, etc.

⁶ Rev. xxii. 6.

the order of prophets was discredited by the rise of Montanism—"the new prophecy" as its detractors called it—and that the old prophetic order practically ceased to exist within the Church by about the end of the second century. Its autocratic attitude towards the regularly appointed ministry, its supreme claim to forgive sins, its right to speak at all times with Divine authority, its ecstasy, amounting in some cases almost to madness, the lack of moral self-control on the part of some of its members, in short, its disorderly, insubordinate, itinerant, fanatical character produced its downfall. We can gather these facts from Christian writers, but perhaps the two most telling, because humorous, indictments of it, come from heathen sources.¹

Plainly the prophetic order was not subserving the purpose for which, as St Paul tells us, prophecy exists.² It was not speaking unto men to edification and comfort and consolation. It was not building up the Church. Rather it was becoming a scandal and a weakness. It could not rule, and it would not serve, so it had to go. Must prophecy then go with the prophetic order? Was prophecy nothing more than the merely temporary result of what Dr Sanday has called "a wave of spiritual exaltation which swept over the whole primitive church?" We cannot think

¹ Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, vii. 9, and Lucian's *Death of Peregrinus*.

² 1 Cor. xiv. 1, 3, 4.

that. "In its most spiritual element the gift of prophecy may be said never to have become extinct in the Christian Church,"¹ writes Dr Armitage Robinson, and every serious student of Church History will agree with him. Henceforth the functions of New Testament prophecy must be regarded as having been absorbed by the regular Christian ministry, although it should be realised that prophecy even during the existence of the prophetic order was never entirely or distinctly separated from the functions of the regular ministry; for instance Polycarp and Ignatius, both bishops, also claimed to be prophets. If prophecy then be a function of the regular ministry, ought we not to see that it has due place to-day in our ministrations? But to do this we must realise its essence, and some of its more abiding purposes and characteristics. To-day our knowledge both of psychology and history helps us to realise, perhaps more clearly than in any preceding age, what the real nature and function of prophecy are.

III

(1) For instance, we know now, that prophecy need involve no loss of consciousness and self-control in the prophet—no quiescence of the understanding. The Holy Spirit does not empty the prophet of his personality and then speak

¹ *Ency. Bibl.*, article, "Prophetic Literature," p. 3887.

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through him, as through a megaphone ; rather the Spirit speaks through the man's natural faculties when all are consciously concentrated upon uttering the Divine message. Prophecy then is not divination, and the Holy Ghost, to use Coleridge's phrase, is not a "divine ventriloquist." Moreover trances, dreams, ecstasies, and visions are not of the essence of prophecy. Many have experienced them who are not prophets.

(2) Again, we realise that prophecy is not necessarily prediction. There may be much prediction which is not prophecy, and much prophecy which is not prediction. There were many remarkable predictions of heathen oracles¹ which we cannot regard as prophecy ; on the other hand, there are many prophecies which do not contain any specific predictions.

(3) Again, we have been enabled to distinguish clearly between prophecy and apocalypse—indeed as clearly as we can distinguish between a church and its steeple—so that not only can we separate prophetic from apocalyptic books, but even the prophetic from the apocalyptic element in the same book. The ability to perceive this distinction has not only given us a deeper realisation of the value of prophecy, but has also enabled us to view with calmness and even with appreciation the decreasing influence of apocalyptic, as something not of the essence of

¹ Cf. F. W. H. Myers's Essay on Greek Oracles in Evelyn Abbott's *Hellenica*.

the Gospel, and so no doubt destined to pass away. For although apocalypse was not without great influence for good in its day, yet inasmuch as it shared in a very large measure the intellectual and moral limitations of its age, its power over men's minds would be bound to decrease in time.

The best example of the New Testament prophet is to be seen, not in John the Apocalypticist, but in John the Baptist. Our Lord spoke of the latter as "a prophet, yea and more than a prophet," and declared that of them born of women there had not arisen a greater than John the Baptist.¹ And yet (if we follow the Synoptic narrative), John the Baptist saw no visions, he fell into no trances, he did not speak in ecstasy, he does not seem to have made any specific predictions. He was pre-eminently a preacher of righteousness and of spiritual religion. The essence of prophecy then is that it is spiritual and moral. The prophet does not see the future with accuracy in all its details, but he does see something much more important. He sees this present world as God's world, and he sees God working through all its movements. The prophet is convinced that this world is governed by moral and spiritual laws which are the expression of the will of God. They are supreme; and all communities, institutions, and individuals who oppose them, must suffer irretrievable ruin. To

¹ *Matt.* xi. 9; *Luke* vii. 26-28.

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live in harmony with these laws, is for moral and spiritual beings, the principle of life. Possessed of these convictions and of a certain moral sensitiveness, the prophet can predict the future in general and conditional terms. But his function is not so much prediction as interpretation. He interprets the past, and he interprets the present, to help the men of his own age to realise the presence and will of God.

IV

Now let us glance at some of the characteristics of the men who had the prophetic spirit.

(1) We cannot but have observed that they spoke with extraordinary force and vigour and originality ; moreover they claimed to speak as interpreting the will of God. Their teaching, therefore, was no mere scribal traditionalism. Their message was what the Holy Spirit was saying to them in their own hearts and in the events of their age. Their authority was thus not so much found in a literature, or in a tradition, or in an institution, as in their own moral and spiritual consciousness. And yet they did not despise traditional truth as contained either in literature or institutions. "The prophet had visions in which new truth was revealed, not contradicting the old but opening and expanding its meaning. . . . Thus in prophecy there came into the Church a new power collateral with

tradition, which gave the tradition a new meaning.”¹

When we study the Old Testament prophets we cannot fail to notice after we have arranged them in chronological order, that their theological and moral teaching is essentially progressive — evolutionary perhaps, rather than revolutionary—though it must often have seemed original, painfully original to their own age, for the prophet like the poet is “a producer.” On the whole the prophetic teaching is more original, more forceful, more comprehensive, more full of moral fervour and spiritual depth, in short, more epoch-making, than the typical teaching of the scribes and wise men who represent “the teachers,” or third order in the Apostolic Church.

(2) Again we cannot have failed to notice the courage of the prophets. In many cases they were the critics of their age. All the greater prophets found much in their surroundings to criticise. Their communities invariably said to them, “Prophesy smooth things unto us.” Whereas oftentimes the prophet’s uncongenial task was to condemn. If a man of sensitive disposition he had to make his face as brass to do this. How safe and easy for him to turn aside and follow the line of least resistance, and yet the glory of the prophets is that as an order they followed the line of greatest resistance, and have even drawn humanity along in their path.

¹ A. V. G. Allen, *Christian Institutions*, p. 28.

But as a consequence of this courage of theirs a long stream of blood has marked the trail of the prophets. Moreover their courage was seen not simply in facing their contemporaries—for men of a certain type this is no difficulty—but in facing events. They at least did not shirk the problems of their age. When men's hearts were failing them for fear of those things which were coming on the earth, the prophet's attitude was one of confidence and hope. Then did he lift up his head and bid the righteous lift up their heads for their redemption was drawing nigh. When the powers in the heaven and in the earth were being shaken, he watched with heroic calm the shaking, and the removal of the things that were shaken, knowing full well that the things which could not be shaken would remain.

(3) Now the source of the prophet's courage was his faith in a righteous God. St Paul bids the prophet prophesy according to the proportion of his faith,¹ and it is only in proportion to his faith that the prophet can prophesy. Where his faith is great, he will not hesitate to face the darkest and most inscrutable problems with courage, and read God's will in them. Thus we have Isaiah seeing in the barbarous Assyrian, an instrument of Jehovah's will! Thus every prophet, however threatening in his denunciations, is an optimist at heart. He has an ideal of the future which transcends the imperfections

¹ Cf. *Rom.* xii. 6.

of the present, because he believes in the final triumph of the moral and spiritual laws by which God is creating and governing the world.

(4) Another point about the prophet is that he is a man of God, in that he strives to observe in his own life the laws which he proclaims. He strives to live as in the presence of that God whose will he reveals. A preacher of righteousness, he acts like a righteous man. In primitive Christian times, two simple tests were applied to the prophet, and they are not out of date to-day. (1) Does the man confess that Jesus is the Lord? (2) Does he observe the Christian moral standard? If he does, then he may be received and his message heard.

V

If the essence of prophecy has been truly defined and the true prophet be of such a type as I have depicted, surely there is great need for the prophetic spirit in our ministry to-day. Although apocalyptic visions may have but little interest and influence with educated persons in the present age, yet laws and principles have the greatest interest for them. One has said that just as the nineteenth century is known as "the century of science," so the twentieth century will be known as "the century of the moral forces."¹

¹ Dr E. E. Hale, *Homiletic Review*, vol. lvii. No. 5, p. 300.

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Certainly he who can exhibit our Lord and His Gospel as the greatest and most attractive moral force in the world of to-day will be doing an incalculable service to it. Surely then the prophetic spirit is needed to-day to interpret our Lord adequately to this age. "There are," so a modern teacher tells us, "two influences which hinder the advance of Christianity, the tradition that the Christian faith is a series of propositions, and the tradition that Christian morality is a series of prohibitions."¹

To-day the prophetic spirit is needed to show a world which is turning away from traditional Christianity, that men are not saved by faith in propositions or in prohibitions, but by striving with the help of the Spirit of God to lead the Divine life revealed by our Lord. Christianity is the realisation of a relationship—"Ye are the children of the Highest" and the seeking to attain the moral and spiritual ideal which that relationship demands—"Be ye therefore perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."

If the prophetic spirit was seen in the fact that it bravely faced the problems of its age, never was there greater need for it than to-day. For to-day the Christian is beset by a multitude of problems—theological, ethical, social, and political, all of which affect his conception of this relationship and of the particular duties which it demands from him in his changing conditions.

¹ Faunce, *The Educational Ideal of the Ministry*, p. 125.

Various and contending voices about these problems are raised. Remembering the saying of Aristotle, that while the things about which men differ are small, the causes of their difference are great, there is an undoubted need for the prophetic spirit of insight to perceive the causes for the different attitudes of different parties, and need also for the courage to exhibit them fearlessly. Never was truer statement made by Thomas Carlyle—himself no mean prophet—that even political fights might ultimately be seen to be fights between the believers in God and the unbelievers in Him, or, more probably, fights between the believers in the lower, and believers in the higher, conception of Him, and so between the adherents of the conflicting aspects of duty which these conflicting conceptions involve.

The ministry of the Church is called to-day to face these modern problems; it must study them, pray for guidance, and then speak about them in the prophetic spirit, in absolute faith that God is working out His purpose through them, and that many things which at first seem rebel spirits are really divine messengers accomplishing His will. "The history of every nation is its own Bible," said Carlyle. If this be so, some of our Bible is being written every day, and the prophetic spirit is needed to interpret it. Those who have the prophetic spirit will strive to do this; those who have not the prophetic spirit will turn away and pray as did a certain

faltering evangelist—"O Lord save us from the perils of modern thought—yea, O Lord deliver us from all thought whatsoever."¹ And will then pour forth from their pulpits empty platitudes and dead dogmas couched in antiquated phraseology—dead because they have not been re-created by the mind of him that utters them, nor developed and strengthened by conflict with the forces of the age. How easy it is to preach the traditional message and when easy to preach, how little influence it has.

"And when they list, their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel Pipes of wretched straw,
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed."

Are there not many of the sheep to-day who are ceasing to look up to the pulpit for any real help in the great difficulties of their lives because it oftentimes has none to give them?

VI

The message which other men have learnt, we can never teach convincingly until it has been made our own in the experience of our life and thought. If prophetic preaching is absent in the Ministry to-day it is because there is a lack of moral earnestness, a lack of spiritual perception, a lack of conviction, the absence of the feeling that we have any message to deliver, any word of the Lord for those whom we have to teach.

¹ Editor of *The Hibbert Journal* at Conference at Oxford, 1909.

Let us then make no mistake, the prophetic function of the ministry demands immense effort—it demands more complete and prolonged concentration of the whole personality than do any of the other ministerial functions. The original thought and literary form of the enduring utterances of the greater prophets show us this. “It is no holiday task to cast out devils, self-indulgent men will never do it”—so also with prophecy. Nevertheless if the ministry is to be efficient this gift must be sought and used.

“Are all prophets?” asks the apostle, and we answer, “No.” But might there not be more prophecy. “Surely yes,” we must reply, if we believe in the Holy Ghost. “He shall take of mine,” said Christ, “and shall show it unto you,” and we, trusting in Him, must take of Christ and apply it to the duties and difficulties of to-day. Very humbly therefore would I urge you to cultivate the prophetic spirit. In the words of St Paul I would address you, “Despise not prophesyings.”¹ “Desire earnestly to prophesy.”² We at least need these exhortations quite as much as did the Christians of the first century. Above all do not allow the prophetic spirit in you to be strangled by the administrative, organising, statistical, financial spirit. It is not altogether meet that we should leave the word of God to serve tables, and yet the prophetic spirit need not lead us

¹ 1 *Thess.* v. 20.

² 1 *Cor.* xiv. 31.

to neglect our other ministerial duties. One of the prophets of this age was Bishop Westcott, and in him the practical and prophetic spirits were equally combined. "The spirit of the prophets is subject unto the prophets," said St Paul.¹ It was because many of the early prophets neglected to observe this precept, that prophecy fell into disrepute. But the prophetic spirit should not only not hinder, but should be the inspiration and guide and strength of the practical spirit, by filling it with the spirit of Christ, and the spirit of Christ is the spirit of love. And so the Apostle who writes to the Corinthians, "Desire earnestly . . . that ye may prophesy," writes also to them these words:—"Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have not love, I am nothing."²

¹ 1 Cor. xiv. 32.

² 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

III

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

SYNOPSIS

- I. Christ condemned the scribes because they could not discern the signs of their times. Why were they blind? Because they overvalued the past and despised the present.
- II. What are the signs of this time? (a) Its preference for the Christianity of Christ to that of the Churches. (b) Its confessed worldliness. (c) Its practical spirit.
- III. Danger of the Church losing her influence with the intellectual part of the nation. The clergy alone can prevent this.
- IV. How? By recognising the need, and by recognising also some other marks of this age; love of truth, humanity, and progress.

III

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

I

“YE know how to discern the face of the heaven, but ye cannot discern the signs of the times.”¹ These words are not found in our most ancient authorities for the text of the first Gospel. That, however, they were uttered in substance by our Lord we can have no reasonable doubt. They are altogether too characteristic of His teaching and of His attitude to the scribes and their teaching to make us doubt that they represent a genuine utterance of His.²

Like other utterances of the Lord they are an emphatic condemnation of the scribes, and here especially of their blindness.

Had we known the scribes we might have felt great surprise, as no doubt they did, at this condemnation. They were a highly educated and decidedly intellectual body of men. They were

¹ *Matt.* xvi. 3.

² Cf. *Luke* xii. 54-56.

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the authoritative religious teachers of their day, and in a way their position was a strong one. They found all their authority either in the writings of the Old Testament or in "the traditions of the Fathers." The truths they taught were the truths which their predecessors had taught—the truths in which many generations of their fathers had lived and died. They never taught anything new. They hardly ever spoke in public without quoting their authorities; and yet when the multitudes listened to the Lord, their verdict curiously enough was this: "He speaketh *with authority* and *not* as do the scribes." The "vox populi" was here the "vox Dei." The scribes never spoke with prophetic power.

But if their hearers condemned them by implication, Christ condemned them directly and absolutely.

He called them blind guides. He declared that although they built the sepulchres of the prophets, and thereby condemned their fathers for stoning the prophets, that nevertheless in this exaggerated reverence for the dead past they were indicating emphatically that the spirit which prompted their fathers to stone the prophets was the spirit which was dominating them. It seems hard to condemn a class of men for their lack of perception, does it not? These scribes could not perceive the signs of the times. They were unable to read the mystic writing on the wall. That was not a great sin, was it?

They were not quite up to date. A little sleepy perhaps, that was all. But Christ condemned this. The men were teachers. It was their business to guide, to lead. They were too blind, too prejudiced, too cowardly, too ignorant to do so, and withal they were extraordinarily arrogant. The arrogance of ignorance; the self-satisfaction of having almost all the educated religious opinion of past generations in their favour; the security of unimpeachable orthodoxy—an absolutely unassailable position in a frontal attack—all this was theirs. And yet Christ condemned them as teachers. And we cannot doubt but that they deserved the condemnation. They crucified the Lord of Glory. Why? Because they could not read the signs of the times. They thought in their blindness that by that act they were saving their commonwealth; they were convinced that thereby they were securing their national and religious polity. It was this criminal, arrogant, self-satisfied, complacent blindness which plunged their Church and nation into ruin.

It is not possible to consider fully why these men were blind. It was the result very largely of their education. And their educational system had grown up and become rigid during the preceding three or four centuries. In some respects that system was analogous to that which prevails in China or in Mohammedan countries to-day. It was purely literary in the worst sense of that

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term, and it exalted the past in all its deadness, all its narrowness, all its ignorance, all its tyranny over the present. Do not think that I am condemning the past by implication. "Every scribe instructed unto the kingdom of God brings out of his treasure things new and old." The past has its value as a teacher. It has its lessons. It has its inspiration. It has its own peculiar honour. But it has its negative side ; it has its dangers. It may throttle the wondrous present. It may blind us to the beauties of the dawning future. It may numb, chill, harden, belittle us. That is what the scribes allowed it to do to them. They used it to hinder progress ; they used it to stop development ; they used it to quench inspiration ; they used it to crush reform, instead, as they might have done, to help it forward. That is why Christ condemned the scribes.

II

But we must leave the scribes. If their age had signs which they could not see, so has ours ; and if we would be in any degree efficient pastors—shepherding, feeding, leading those committed to our charge—we must strive to see the signs of this age—to read their meaning, and to use it in teaching our flock.

What are some of these signs ? I will select three for special comment.

(a) Perhaps the most striking is the determination to separate, in thought at any rate, Christianity from all the philosophical and ecclesiastical *impedimenta* which it has accumulated through the ages, and to behold it as purely spiritual and moral. The men of to-day—especially those who are leaving the Church or who are unwilling to enter it, and they are a growing multitude—in London ten out of every twelve—demand—if they make any religious demand at all—not the Christianity of the great Church Councils, not the Christianity of the mediæval scholastics, not the Christianity of the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformation, but the Christianity of Christ. This demand of theirs may be made in terms which are unpleasant or ignorant or fanatical ; it may be joined with other demands which we regard as unreasonable. There the demand is, however. We may try to explain to them, according to our particular “views,” that this or that kind of Christianity which we have just specified is the Christianity of Christ. They will not, except they are very polite—and some of them are not—even seem to trouble to listen to us.

Therefore it would seem to be our duty and our wisdom to try to teach our people the Christianity of Christ. For this purpose it will be necessary to think out quite clearly what Christ’s message to mankind is. To do this is not quite so easy as one might suppose. To

realise it, to teach it with power, we shall have not only to study our New Testament and the best modern books dealing with it, but other religions as well. Archdeacon Wilson in his *Hulsean Lectures* very pertinently remarks: "Buddhism is older than Christianity, Mahometanism has kept its millenary, and shows few signs of decay. Of what are the Christian, Buddhist, Mahometan faiths or churches the evidence? That is the point. They are the evidence of some essential element in human nature, some truth rooted in our very existence, some relation to our origin, our Creator. This I admit. But what relation? What ground do you stand on? If you wish to be taken seriously you must answer this."¹

In the past many Christian teachers have picked out certain points in ordinary Christian teaching which they have regarded as unique. Wider study and more sympathetic study of other religions has shown that they were mistaken. Therefore to realise what is unique and what is universal in Christianity we must try to study the other great religions of the world, as well as the development in history of our own. It will add greatly to the force and lucidity of our teaching when we have learnt what the Christian religion is in itself, and what it is in its relation to other great manifestations, past and present, of the religious spirit. Such a study will

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 18, 19.

help us to realise and our hearers to realise that the Gospel of Christ is the only religion for this modern world, if it is to have a religion at all. That Christ's religion is the only religion that is "in time" with modern progress. That Christian principles are the only principles which are capable of guiding and elevating the individual, social, and national life of to-day. That it is only by moving onwards towards the full practice of these principles, and the creation of a sphere where they can have their full sway without injury to the individuals who practise them—it is only in this direction—that the hope of all progress which is not merely material lies.

And do let us put these great Gospel principles first, always first in our teaching, and the commandments of men and their philosophies and deductions second. So shall we best serve the men of this age and their Lord and ours. And here let me utter a warning. Do not hastily regard something as fundamentally Christian which is not really so. And above all do not let your hearers make any mistake on this point because of hurried, slovenly, or shallow teaching. Let me try to illustrate this. A Chinese convert was asked by a missionary, what particular doctrine he regarded as unique in Christian theology? He replied: "The Christian religion is quite different from the Chinese, because it teaches that God is three in one and one in three."

Now this doctrine of the Trinity in Unity can

hardly be considered a doctrine of Christ, it is a deduction from it, and was not made in thought until more than a century at least after our Lord taught. Moreover, in comparison with such doctrines as the Fatherhood of God, the Sonship of Christ, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the power of Christian prayer, the brotherhood of man, the nature of eternal life, it may be said to have no attractive or inspiring force at all. The same man was asked wherein, from his own experience, Christian differed from heathen, practice. He replied: "Before I became a Christian I beat my wife, now my wife beats me." No doubt he wished to say that Christianity, as the Lord taught it, places first in its list of virtues those which give evidence of the spirit of love in the human heart, as, for example, meekness, long-suffering, patience; but the way in which he expressed this might easily lead a captious, not to say a hostile, audience to believe that Christianity is subversive of domestic and so of social and political order. Let us then take care not only that we know and realise what the fundamentals of the Christian religion are, but that we strive so to teach them that men may not only understand, but rather so that they cannot possibly misunderstand them.

(b) Let us pass to another mark of the age. It is its confessed *worldliness*. This age, unlike some former periods, is not engaged in gazing up earnestly into heaven. It has no expectation of

seeing celestial visions or of listening to angelic voices. It might be better if its gaze were heavenward, but if we can read the signs of the times we see plainly that it is not looking there. It is looking at the earth; it is not thinking very much about a future life; it is thinking a great deal about this present one. Theology has but little interest for it, sanitation the greatest, as have also the cure of disease, the elimination of poverty, the conditions of labour, the abolition of war, the progress of scientific discovery, the future relations of the white, black, and yellow races, and many other less worthy objects. Now we cannot change the world's interests in a day. If we are wise we shall use them. We shall be asking ourselves repeatedly, What is Christ's message in these matters? How do Christian principles bear upon them? And we shall make the answer to these questions one side at least of our teaching.

(c) I will but mention one more sign of this time closely akin to the last. It is its *practical spirit*. When we realise this we shall try to exhibit the Christian religion in its practical side—as a life rather than a theory; as a thing needful for happiness in this world; as a purpose and an ideal which can make any human life an unqualified success; in short, as that alone which here and now can give to any human being, whatever his outward conditions may be, that life which is life indeed. Dr Lang in his book,

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The Opportunity of the Church of England, speaking of this practical spirit, says: "This amount of deference we can pay to (it). . . . We can recognise it by making the appeal of our teaching not only to the understanding, but to the fundamental needs of human life. Let me give an illustration of what I mean. It is in a striking letter in the life of Tennyson, from Professor Henry Sidgwick: 'What *In Memoriam* did for us, for me at least, in this struggle, was to impress on us the ineffaceable and ineradicable conviction that humanity will not and cannot acquiesce in a godless world; the "man in men" will not do this, whatever individual men may do, whatever they may temporarily feel themselves driven to do, by following methods which they cannot abandon to the conclusions to which these methods at present seem to lead.' It is always to the 'man in men,' of which Mr Sidgwick speaks, that we have to address our teaching. It is not elaborate apologetics or arguments, not formal disquisitions, any more than emotional exhortations, that educated men really want in our sermons; it is the clear, honest, intelligent presentment of our faith in its relation to the best desires and deepest needs of their actual lives."

And now to meet a possible objection. Let us not say, "I have not the faculties for this sort of thing. This is not the work of any ordinary parish priest. It is my duty to perform the

Services, conduct the various parish organisations, visit the poor, the sick, and so on. The signs of the times and the special teaching necessary to meet them is a task for Bampton or Hulsean Lecturers." It is that attitude which has made an American writer who is read by tens of thousands of his countrymen assert, that the clergy of the various denominations have one marked characteristic in common. They are all behind the times, and run in the wake of progress and reform, bawling as loud as they can, Stop ! Stop ! Stop !

III

The great Master of Balliol foresaw the danger in England, of Christianity "dying from the head downwards," as he phrased it—that is, losing its hold first on the intellectual classes of the nation. If these are lost to the Church, let us not imagine that we shall keep or win the populace. Dr Lang, a very different type of Churchman from Professor Jowett, echoes his words. He writes : "The issue, then, is simply this : whether or not in the years to come the Church of England is to justify the old and honourable boast that it retains the loyalty of an educated laity more fully than any other Church in Christendom. I know perfectly well that many of you will think 'this is not a matter that directly concerns us ; our work will be largely among the poor,' or 'we

have not the gifts which are necessary to this special task.' But let me insist that we are ordained to the ministry of the Church of God before we are licensed to any particular parish ; that therefore we can never escape our share of responsibility for the work and credit of the Church as a whole ; that in our own, however casual, intercourse with individuals whom we know, with our equals and friends, or in work to which at any time we may be called, that responsibility as regards educated persons may become immediate and direct ; that therefore none of us can treat this matter as indifferent. It will be a real disaster to English Christianity if the English Church continues to devote the best energy of its best men exclusively to the thought and care of the working classes or of the poor." ¹ And so, as he remarks elsewhere : " What we all want, then, is not so much detailed learning, for that is a matter of talent and opportunity, as a clear and intelligent attitude of mind towards the great questions of religion, but especially towards those which occupy the minds of men at the present day." ²

IV

How can we attain that attitude ?

First, by feeling that it is absolutely necessary. To realise the need is half-way towards supplying

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 102.

² *Op. cit.*, p. 63.

it. Secondly, by recognising the painful fact that the clerical calling is extremely prejudicial to such an attitude. In proportion as we are conscientious in the discharge of the round of the daily duties of our office we shall find it hard to keep this attitude. It should of course be our constant aim to discharge our parish duties punctually and industriously, and yet let us remember that it is this routine work which will narrow and harden us, and make us formal and lazy if we are not very careful. Lazy I say advisedly, for there is the laziness of the industrious—a most dangerous kind of laziness. It consists of “grooviness.” The unwillingness to tear oneself away from routine however hard that routine may be. The tendency to let ourselves be dominated by a single idea, our teaching about which is very apt to degenerate into a cant or jargon—a mere set of phrases which will inevitably take the place of all fresh and intelligent thinking about it. Let us determine therefore at regular intervals to tear our minds away from our daily routine. Let us determine to plunge them regularly into an element which is very different from that which our daily parish work creates. I suppose the ideal way of doing this would be by visiting intelligent and educated men who know nothing about our parish work, perhaps even very little about the Church of England. Men who do not view things from the standpoint of our clerical friends, or of our most

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devout parishioners, and who may seem to us to have but imperfect sympathy with present-day organised Christianity. We can visit these, if not in the flesh, at least by reading—shall we say such a publication, as *The Hibbert Journal*, and such writers as Professor William James, Sir Oliver Lodge, Professor Henry Jones, Mr H. G. Wells, and many others. Their writings will bring home to us some at least of the signs of the times, and will thereby help us to use those signs in our teaching.

It is a truism to remark that this is a great age — one which in comparison makes even “the spacious times of great Elizabeth ” seem cramped and narrow—yet of all classes clergymen are the most apt to forget it. To them, to judge by their public utterances, it seems oftentimes to be an age which demands only lamentation, apprehension, supplication—an age dominated by materialism, criticism, scepticism, the love of pleasure, and the pursuit of money. This is not a true view of it. It has with all its faults three great virtues at least—love of truth, love of humanity, love of progress. Its peculiar faults are due in no small degree to the fact that it is moving so fast in the domains of thought and knowledge, and is in consequence so rapidly changing its conception of God, man, Scripture, and religion, that the ordinary person hardly knows quite where he is or ought to be in these matters, but feels assured that he ought not to

be where the thirteenth or sixteenth centuries placed his ancestors. What the age especially demands in the clergy is comprehension and sympathy. Without these we cannot realise the signs of the times. If these are realised and utilised the new but still the old Gospel may yet win the whole world in the age that is opening, or as seems possible we English clergy, with all our advantages, may let this opportunity escape us and bring down upon ourselves the justly deserved condemnation which befell the scribes and that ignominy which is the allotted portion of those who allow great tides in the affairs of men to be missed because they have neither the perception nor the courage and energy to use them.

The "greater things" of which Christ prophesied are waiting even to-day to be done. The fields as ever "are white already to harvest, and he that reapeth receiveth wages and gathereth fruit to life eternal."

IV

DOGMA AND HOW TO TREAT IT

SYNOPSIS

- I. Dogma has an unpleasant sound. Due to (a) the *Odium Theologicum*, (b) "the passing of conviction."
- II. Difficulties of dogmatic teaching in an age of transition. Yet to teach a dogmatic Christianity is necessary. Dogma has two senses: (1) A decree; (2) a principle. The former but not the latter is opposed to the spirit of the age.
- III. The clergyman is not free to decide upon Christian dogmas, but only as to how he will use them. These dogmas fall into three classes: (1) Spiritual; (2) Historical; (3) Scholastic.
- IV. Characteristics of Spiritual Dogmas: (a) Recognised as native by the human soul; (b) proved experimentally.
- V. Characteristics of Historical Dogmas. They involve problems of criticism. How to treat them in preaching.
- VI. Characteristics of Scholastic Dogmas. They are not infallible, but have a certain authority. They should be treated as provisionally true. They should be taught historically. It is to be remembered that Dogma is open to re-statement.

IV

DOGMA AND HOW TO TREAT IT

I

THERE is, I suppose, no word which has a more unpleasant sound to modern ears than that of dogma. It suggests to many minds all that is painfully narrow, ignorant, antiquated, intolerant, and unreasonable.

There are at least two reasons for this.

The first reason is that the *odium theologicum* which so often marks dogmatic controversies is regarded by the average man as the product of dogma, instead of being a product of the unregenerate human heart.

The second reason lies in "the passing of conviction." This is due to the extraordinary increase in knowledge attained during the past two generations. But increase in knowledge has a negative as well as a positive result. It leads not only to the acquisition of new truths, but also to the rejection of many views which were

formerly regarded as true. And as a result of this negative action, almost all old statements of truth are viewed with suspicion, and what is more, many who have held views which they have afterwards abandoned as discredited, have impatiently or despairingly assumed the attainment of truth at least in those departments, to be an impossibility. The effect upon old-established beliefs, which the modern advance in knowledge has produced, is well expressed in the following paragraph :—

“ We have looked towards the earth on which we live, and have found the proofs of an antiquity so vast that the age of man has shrivelled into insignificance. We have looked towards the heavens and our eyes have seen myriad multitudes of worlds in the processes of making. We have looked towards man and the long history of man, and the vision of a golden age has vanished ; historical criticism has exposed the absurdities of literal inspiration ; comparative mythology has explained the myth and the miracle ; sociology has presented a vision of nations, races and civilisations growing, declining, dying ; and science, supreme disillusioner, has revealed in man, who thought himself heaven-descended, the mark of the ape—in man, who believed himself free, the product of the twin despotism of heredity and environment.”

II

To-day the Christian Church is experiencing such a period of transition and trial as the prophet Hosea foretold should befall the Israel of his day. "The children of Israel shall abide many days without a king, and without a priest, and without a sacrifice, and without a sacred obelisk, and without ephod, and without teraphim ; afterwards shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God." ¹

This was the means, painful and difficult both for priest and patriot, by which the moral, spiritual, and universal elements in the religion of Israel were liberated from the superstition and materialism and localism of an earlier age. In the process devout Israelites lost much which they in common with their forefathers regarded as the essentials of their religious faith and worship, to find in the end that those things which they had supposed to be the essentials of their faith were not the essentials at all.

In consequence of this rapid and disconcerting transition, many of the teachers of dogmatic Christianity find themselves in a very difficult position, and their task a most unpopular and unconvincing performance.

Yet to teach some form of dogmatic Christianity is necessary for the salvation of individuals

¹ *Hosea* iii. 4, 5.

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and communities in the widest sense of that term. It is true that we have in Charles Lamb, an example of a most undogmatic saint, and in St Jerome, an example of a most dogmatic one, and that this age regards the former as infinitely more Christlike than the latter ; nevertheless any man who will take long and broad views must acknowledge that the case of Charles Lamb is exceptional. History has not yet shown us that morality of a lofty kind can exist for long among the generality of men without a religious basis, and a religious basis has to be formulated dogmatically.

While admitting that religion and ethics have not a common origin and were not originally one, but have become united in some measure in all the higher religions, there is yet a large body of evidence which indicates that as the higher religions are compelled to become ethical, so the nobler systems of ethics are compelled to seek a religious basis. But our view of the need for the dogmatic formulation of this religious basis must depend on the sense we attach to dogma. It had two uses amongst the Greeks. It meant a decree by those in authority. It meant also the postulates of a philosophical school. The popular prejudice against dogma is almost entirely confined to the first type of dogma—Christian teaching formulated as Church law, truth decreed by ecclesiastical authority which must be accepted under penalties. It is this aspect of compulsion in dogma “over-riding the

reason and conscience of men, and suppressing the right and duty of individual judgment" that offends the religious mind, which views the Church as a voluntary fellowship of the Spirit. It is also this aspect of dogma that offends the scientific mind, because it gives the impression which those who decree these dogmas and uphold them have been only too ready to maintain, that such dogmas are immutable, that they are above criticism, and that they form the essence of religion, whereas they are merely its intellectual expression, and are thus an ever-changing product of a living religion. If only, but this is almost impossible now, such is the prejudice which exists against the word dogma, it could be confined to its philosophical sense as meaning certain postulates or principles of Christianity, which any reasonable adherent of it must accept, much of the prejudice against the term dogma would die. But quite apart from the term, the thing itself is a necessity. As that notable liberal Christian, Auguste Sabatier, wrote: "One cannot conceive either dogma without a Church, or a Church without dogma. The two notions are correlative and inseparable" ¹ "A religion without doctrine, a piety without thought, a feeling without expression, these are things essentially contradictory." ²

¹ Page 229.

² Page 336. *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion based on Psychology and History*, Eng. Trans.

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Hence if we desire the moral development of mankind, we must in our teaching maintain a dogmatic religious basis, and of all such bases, I here assume that the Christian is the best, for Christianity is the only great religion in the world that can be made to march "in time" with modern progress; it alone of all religions can make the most profound appeal to the modern man.

III

In the case of those who are clergymen of the Church of England, or about to become such, there is little scope either for the choice or formulation of Christian dogmas. For such their dogmas are already formulated in the Book of Common Prayer, and the claim which is made for those dogmas and from which they draw all their authority is that they are based upon the teaching of Holy Scripture.

Now when we examine the dogmas in the formularies of the Church of England, we find that we can divide them roughly into three classes. I emphasise the word "roughly," because reflection will show that some of them can be placed in two or even three classes according to the point from which they are viewed. The threefold classification of dogma which I should adopt is as follows:—

(1) *Spiritual dogmas*.—These are the axiomatic truths of the spiritual life, and from the

logical point of view they are incapable of demonstration. Such are the dogmas that God is our Father, that God is love, and light, and truth. In the same class I should place the dogma that Jesus Christ is the Divine Logos, the express image in character and will of the Father; the dogma that the Holy Spirit is the regenerator, illuminator and comforter of mankind, especially of those who are of the household of the faith; the dogma of a future life (one aspect of this will include the resurrection of Jesus Christ) and of eternal judgment.

(2) *Historical Dogmas*.—These rely for their proof upon historical evidence primarily. Such are the dogmas of the Virgin birth, Christ's miracles, the descent into Hades (as our evidence for this depends altogether upon written statements), the resurrection and ascension viewed as physical not as spiritual facts, the outpouring of the extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the dogma that the Christian Church was founded by Jesus, Who also instituted the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist.

(3) *Scholastic Dogmas*.—These consist of hermeneutical and philosophical decisions. Their validity depends upon the soundness of the method used in their investigation. Under this head would come the dogmas of the Trinity in Unity and the Unity in Trinity, original sin, the

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nature of the sacraments, theories of the atonement, predestination, free-will, etc.

I do not claim that this classification is absolutely accurate, and it is very far from complete, but I think it serves to emphasise a real distinction in our Church dogmas. This will be more evident when we have examined each of these classes a little more closely.

IV

When we examine the first class, which consists of dogmas of supreme importance, we perceive that they rest in the last resort upon the faith that the Universe is rational and moral in its aim, and that the creative process will, at least when that process is completed, if not before, be able to justify itself to all moral and rational beings. If it be asked whence we derive this conviction that the creative process must needs be rational and moral, the answer is that this conviction is derived from ourselves—from the constitution of human nature. These dogmas of the first class have two characteristics.

(a) Every human being who is not blinded by lovelessness, sensuousness and thoughtlessness, not only wishes them to be true, but when they are adequately presented to the human soul they are accepted as true. They, like the Platonic ideas, are recognised by the soul of man as native to him, and when once they have been

recognised, they can never be forgotten entirely. They are :—

“Truths that wake, to perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavour,
. . . Nor all that is at enmity with joy,
Can utterly abolish or destroy.”

These truths are the great heritage of our religious evolution, they are the refined gold which humanity has gained by that long and painful and providential process of development. They are essential to all sure and high, moral and spiritual progress. Without them mankind must fall back again into the gulf of sensualism, materialism, and superstition from which it has partly emerged.

(b) The second mark of these dogmas is that they can be proved experimentally. Their proof is reached through life not through logic. *Solvitur ambulando, operando, vivendo*—and not otherwise.

The teachings of Ritschl, the humanism of our English philosophers, the pragmatism of the American Professor, William James, all seem to emphasise this fact. By being convinced of this, it does not follow that I “vilify reason,” which, as Bishop Butler has said, “is the candle of the Lord within us,” but simply that I refuse to vilify the reality of my moral and spiritual emotions. Though the fact that these great central truths of the Gospel can only be adequately proved by the test of experience, is

especially the message of Christian teachers to this age, it is nevertheless one which has always been known to the saints.

W. R. Inge's *Christian Mysticism* and all its successors leave no doubt as to that fact. But I shall not go to one who was a mystic to illustrate and emphasise this point. Richard Baxter, the Puritan Divine, in his *Unreasonableness of Infidelity*¹ thus writes : " So if the tempter should persuade such a man to doubt whether the Gospel be true or be God's word, he may have recourse into his soul for a testimony of it ; thence he can tell the tempter, by experience, that he hath found the promises of this Gospel made good to him. ' Christ hath there promised to send His Spirit into the souls of His people, and so He hath done by me ; He hath promised to give light to them that sit in darkness, and to guide their feet into the ways of peace ; to bind up the broken-hearted, and set at liberty the captives ; and all this He hath fulfilled upon me : all that He hath spoken about the power of His word and grace, and the nature of its effects, I have found upon myself. The help which He promised in temptations, the hearing of prayers, the relief in distress ; all these I have found performed ; and, therefore, I know that the Gospel is true.' "

If you analyse these experiences of Baxter, I think you will see that they rest upon the truth

¹ *Works*, vol. xx. p. 162.

of the dogmas which I have placed in the first class, not of those which I have placed in the second and third. Now these dogmas of the first class are the dogmas which it is supremely necessary to treat in sermons, and to treat from this idealistic and experimental point of view, and as we teach them with conviction, simplicity, and love, we shall cause the flowers of the spiritual life to bloom on all sides.

V

We now pass to the second class of dogmas which deal with historical facts. The treatment of these immediately brings us face to face with the difficult problems of lower or textual criticism, of higher or literary criticism, and of historical criticism.

The problems of lower criticism are pretty well solved unless some new codices of the New Testament or of other early Christian literature should be discovered. The problems of higher or literary criticism we are perhaps half way through with. The battles of the near future will be those of historical criticism. This is the opinion of one of our best known New Testament scholars. Now, except the death of Christ and the presence of the charismatic gifts in the Apostolic Church, there is hardly one of these remaining historical dogmas which, whatever our personal convictions may be as to its truth, is regarded by historical

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students as resting on incontrovertible historical evidence.

What, then, are we to do in our sermons with these dogmas, especially if it should be our lot to minister to an educated and highly intelligent congregation? I will mention, first of all, four things we must do.

(1) We must not be silent. If we belonged to that class whom the poet describes:—

“Achilles ponders in his tent, the kings of modern thought
are dumb,

Silent they are but not content, they wait to see the
future come,

Silent while thoughts engrave the brow,

Silent—the best are silent now.”

We might be silent too. If we were primarily philosophers or scientists or historical critics, we might adopt the attitude of “holding no form of creed but contemplating all.” It might be our wisdom to do so. But we are not of their tribe, however philosophical or scientific we may be. We are Christian teachers. We have a message to deliver; we have a faith to maintain; we have an ideal to which we desire to win men. We cannot afford to wait until all historical and scientific questions are settled, before we deliver our message. Our Church festivals come round and then at least, if not on many other occasions, our people expect us to treat these dogmas in our sermons. Silence with regard to them then

would produce a painful sensation. So then we must not be silent.

(2) We must not treat them in the tentative and extremely critical fashion which marks their treatment by our most brilliant scholars in England and Germany and America. Such action is legitimate for them, but not for us. To treat our historical dogmas in that way would be worse than useless. It would mean discrediting them immediately in the eyes of any ordinary congregation. It would mean the raising of all sorts of doubts in their minds which they had until then never dreamt of.

(3) We must not use merely conventional language about them. We must not preach what we do not really believe about them because we think that our people expect it, and that it will soothe and comfort them and somehow do them good as it seems to have done in days gone by. The past is in this matter no index of what is best in the present. This warning is hardly necessary. Still, as it is a possibility that some might offer this solution of the difficulty, I feel justified in referring to it.

(4) We must not treat them in our sermons with the somewhat ignorant assurance and, may I say it, robustious materialism with which not a few of the preachers of the Christian evidence sermons of some years ago treated them.

We must read carefully the best books on these subjects—not books of the kind which

claim to cover the whole range of Christian evidences in some three hundred of four hundred pages—but books by our best modern scholars dealing very fully with but one point. Professor Harnack's or Sir W. M. Ramsay's books are a good example of this class. We must try to realise what the objections to these dogmas are, as well as the evidence in their favour. We shall thus approach them with a much broader view and a much more serious apprehension of the problems among which we are moving than any of our congregation are perhaps aware, and I think we should not let them know it in the pulpit, though in private in the case of a man who has difficulties in his faith, it may not be amiss to let him see that a thoughtful and well-read clergyman has perhaps from the intellectual point of view more arguments—though less reason—for being a sceptic than many of his parishioners. But there are two positive rules which we ought to observe in the treatment of these dogmas in the pulpit.

The first is this. Carefully distinguish between what is essential and what is not essential in the dogma. All parts of it are not of equal value, any more than all parts of the Bible. Let us take first for example the dogma of Christ's resurrection.

The essential part in that dogma is that Christ's personality survived death and that He, in some mysterious way, convinced His Apostles

of that fact, and that in so impressive a fashion, that they apparently were willing to stake the destiny of their lives upon it. The way in which Christ survived death and the means by which He communicated the fact of His survival to His Apostles is not of the essence of the dogma of the resurrection. Now, when we come to examine the evidence adduced for the resurrection, we find that it is exceedingly strong for the essential part of the dogma, but comparatively weak and certainly conflicting for the non-essential part. But suppose that in our sermon we mistake the non-essential for the essential part. The probable effect of our sermon will be this that we shall have weakened the hold of the dogma as a whole on the minds of some of the more logical and thoughtful of our congregation. It is most unwise to stake the truth of the resurrection upon a special theory of it, especially where the evidence is conflicting. So I would say if you are going to nail your colours to the mast, and there is need to do so at times, be careful you nail them to a sound mast, the very best mast you have.

I will touch on one other dogma, for it has been very much in evidence. I refer to the Virgin Birth. Many Churchmen of eminence have spoken as though the Virgin Birth were essential to the Incarnation, and that if we did not believe the first dogma we could not believe the second. Reflection should surely suggest

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that such a fact as the Incarnation can hardly, in the nature of things, be dependent upon any single physical process. In fact, as you know, the original Nicene Creed had in it no reference to the Virgin Birth, not because the Nicene Fathers did not believe in it, but because, as I think, it is not an integral part of the dogma of the Incarnation.¹ In any case when an increasing number of historical critics of the New Testament are telling us that the evidence for the Virgin Birth is conflicting and inconclusive, it seems an unwise thing to base the dogma of the Incarnation upon it, for it must inevitably mean that many will never give a second thought to the doctrine of the Incarnation as soon as they surrender their belief in the Virgin Birth.

My first rule, then, would be this. Distinguish carefully between the essential and the non-essential portions of these historical dogmas. Unless you adopt a strong position, and it is only the essential part of these dogmas that you can feel absolutely sure of, you will do more harm than good—and then put all your emphasis on that essential part.

My second rule would be this. Use these dogmas only for the moral and spiritual teaching that can be drawn from them. Use them as facts emphasising in striking fashion the existence

¹ See letter by the Dean of Westminster to the Archbishop of Canterbury, which forms the preface to *Some Thoughts on the Incarnation*, by Armitage Robinson, D.D., in support of this view.

of some great moral principle or spiritual law or process. When you use them in that way I think that you will find that the great bulk of the moral and spiritual teaching is to be obtained from the essential and not from the non-essential part of the dogma.

Now, if you only use those aspects of these historical dogmas which contain deep moral and spiritual lessons, you will probably escape altogether the temptation to treat the non-essential aspects of them. By so teaching you will on the one hand be directly assisting the spiritual life of your people, and on the other hand you will not be bringing under their notice points of view which can only increase the difficulties of faith for them in a difficult age.

The Apostle speaks of rightly dividing the word of truth.¹ This would be a case for the exercise of this injunction.

But if I may say a word on the other side. Do not think because these non-essential dogmas or aspects of dogma have not any marked spiritual lessons for this age, that they have not had such for ages that are past, or may not have such for ages which are yet to come. What Bishop Butler said of certain passages of Holy Scripture may also be true of these aspects of dogma. He says that it is highly probable that passages of Scripture which have but little meaning or none for his own age may yet as the result of diligent

¹ ὁρθοτομοῦντα τὸν λόγον, 2 *Tim.* ii. 15.

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investigation—"the comparing and pursuing by particular persons of intimations in Scripture which had been overlooked or disregarded by the generality, or as the result of the passage of events in the outer world—yield much instruction for the men of some future generation." Or as one has remarked, commenting on this thought of Butler: "There may be passages in the Bible whose full meaning is not yet discovered, and which are reserved to quell some future heresy, or resolve some yet unformed doubt or confound some error which hath not yet a name." Therefore, one would not wish them to be cut hastily out of our formularies, but on the other hand it would be a mistake to use them without some very definite moral and spiritual purpose. It is not because a dogma is in the Creed that therefore one must preach on it, any more than one must preach on a text because it is in Holy Scripture.

VI

We pass now to the third class of dogma—scholastic dogmas. These dogmas are dogmas in the more technical sense of the term. They are decisions, judgments, decrees, given as to the right view, the true interpretation of certain facts—historical, moral, and spiritual.

It is these particular dogmas which often

produce most difficulty and rouse most opposition on the part of educated laymen.

Our branch of the Church has fortunately been somewhat less lavish in the promulgation of them than many other religious bodies, as may be seen by comparing our formularies with the Tridentine Decrees or with the Westminster Confession. In the days when the plenary verbal inspiration of Scripture was generally believed, these dogmas, inasmuch as they were for the most part based upon the interpretation of certain scriptural texts—in fact were often little more than logical deductions from logical deductions from them—were more susceptible of defence than they are to-day, when the whole system of biblical interpretation has been revolutionised by criticism. But the questions for us to consider with regard to them are these :—

1. Are we to treat them in our sermons or not ?
2. Are we to treat them as absolutely authoritative or not ?

In answer to the first I should say, where they are purely speculative or almost purely so, like the doctrine of predestination, you will do well to ignore their existence. Time spent on them will be wasted (or at any rate it could be spent far better) and your people and you might thereby acquire a habit of useless speculation. You remember that Milton makes the fallen angels in hell, in the little leisure they have

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from their occupation of warring with heaven and tempting man, occupy themselves with the discussion of such subjects as—

“Providence, foreknowledge, will and fate,
Fixt fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute.”¹

And Longfellow in his *Golden Legend* shows us the result of such speculations at Salerno—

“A land of wranglings and of quarrels,
Of brains that seethe, and hearts that burn,”

—and makes Satan declare in language which I think is worth remembering—

“As long as the boastful human mind
Consents in such mills as these to grind,
I sit very firmly on my throne ;
Of a truth it almost makes me laugh
To see men leaving the golden grain
To gather in piles the pitiful chaff.”

But to answer the second question. Are we to treat the remaining dogmas as absolutely authoritative or not ?

Personally, I feel quite unable to regard them as absolutely authoritative. To regard them as absolutely authoritative seems to me to involve as a logical necessity a belief in the infallibility of the Church.

Now I cannot bring myself to believe in the infallibility of the Church, still less in any single portion of it. But I do believe in its inspiration,

¹ *Paradise Lost*, bk. ii., 560.

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which is a very different matter. To regard these scholastic dogmas as infallible seems to me to be contrary to the principles of the Reformation and also of sound reason. Our Article XXI., speaking of the authority of General Councils, declares that "forasmuch as they be an assembly of men, whereof all be not governed with the Spirit and Word of God, they may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God," and Article XIX. declares that the Churches of Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome have erred in matters of faith.

This is set forth with great precision by the judicious Hooker.

He writes : " Now, it is not required, nor can be exacted at our hands, that we should yield unto anything our assent, than such as doth answer the evidence which is to be had of that we assent unto. For men to be tied and led by authority as it were, with a kind of captivity of judgment, and though there be reason to the contrary not to listen unto it, but to follow like beasts the first in the herd, they know not nor care not whither, this were brutish. Again, that authority of men should prevail with men either against or above reason is no part of our belief. ' Companies of learned men,' be they never so great and reverend, are to yield unto reason ; the weight whereof is no whit prejudiced by the simplicity of his person which doth allege it, but being found to be sound and good, the

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bare opinion of men to the contrary must of necessity stoop and give place.”¹

But because these dogmas are not infallible and so have not absolute authority, have they therefore no authority at all? May they be lightly discarded? May they be treated with contempt? Not so.

Authority is of various kinds; it is of various degrees; it rests on various sanctions.

There is the authority of law—legislative enactment. This is concerned with overt acts, and except in the most tyrannous states it cannot extend to men’s thoughts, though it may take cognisance of their utterances.

Then there is the authority of learning and intellectual power, the authority of a Hooker, of a Butler, of a Lightfoot, and in proportion as we have some little learning, so will such authority weigh heavily with us.

Then there is the authority of holiness. The authority of a mind attuned to the influence of the Holy Ghost, a mind which hears the still small voice of the Spirit speaking through its own self-consciousness—the authority of an Isaiah and a St Paul.

Again, there is the authority of love. The authority of a father, a mother, a husband, a wife, a beloved ruler—an authority which in certain circumstances it shocks our whole moral consciousness to put aside.

¹ *Eccl. Pol.* bk. ii., ch. vii., par 6.

Now, these remaining scholastic dogmas have a good deal of these kinds of authority attaching to them. Church Councils have enacted them, inspired men have preached them, learned men have supported them, holy men have lived by them, brave men have died for them. We shall therefore give them our respectful attention, our prayerful consideration before we reject or refute them. But we cannot undertake to regard them as absolutely and eternally true, simply because they have the support of this authority. But though we may not regard them as absolutely and eternally true, it does not follow of necessity that we must regard them as untrue, and teach others so. There is a middle course, and for those whom we have to teach, who are troubled in conscience, it may be well to put it forward.

For example, take the Nicene interpretation of the mystery of the Trinity, or the Chalcedonian decision as to the relation of the Manhood to the Godhead in Christ. Now I may, I think, both honestly and reasonably adopt this attitude towards these dogmas and others of a like kind. I do not think that human beings in their present state have any faculties for making absolute decisions of this kind. Insufficient data, mental and moral imperfections, all prevent it being done with certainty. I do not feel at all assured that infinite mystery is a legitimate sphere for the exercise of scholastic logic. However, if these objections are not really operative, then I accept

the Nicene - Chalcedonian interpretation of the Church on these points in preference to the interpretations of Sabellius, Arius, Apollinarius, Eutyches and all that brood.¹

This, I think, is a wise and justifiable attitude to adopt in our teaching. It means that we accept these dogmas as relatively true—that is, in preference to other rejected decisions on these points. Above all we accept them as true because of the moral and spiritual value which they possess in contrast to all the other solutions offered.

So in treating these dogmas in your sermons I should always advise you to teach them *historically*. Trace the rise of the dogma, show what opinions were current at the time, explain why and how the Church decided as she did, and most of all the spiritual and moral results which flowed and still flow from such a decision. Of course there are many other scholastic dogmas which have not such weight in their favour as those I have just mentioned, they, I conceive, may be treated with less respect. In the providence of God our Reformers did not burden us with very many of these, but it is absurd to think that some or many or all of them should not be open to restatement.

To deny the possibility of our restating Church dogmas is absurd. It is to deny the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church of this age. It is

¹ Cf. Lotze's *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion*, p. 167.

to deny the continued spiritual, moral and mental evolution of humanity.

“I hold that through the ages an increasing purpose runs,
And the thoughts of men are widened with the process of
the suns.”

Shall the decisions of fallible men of any one age bind the Church for all succeeding ages ? Shall our decisions bind absolutely those that come after us ? Can we not trust the Holy Spirit ? Can we not trust the *anima humana naturaliter Christiana* ? If we can, then there is nothing to fear, nothing to lose, but everything to gain by admitting frankly, freely, cordially, that dogma can and must in many cases be restated and that it is part of our privilege, trusting in the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to restate it—not for all time but for the needs of the men of our own age. But we can only do this if we are Christian men ; if we are not, any restatement that we may make will probably be a mere shallow rationalism.

I should wish to conclude this paper with, as I think, a most suggestive quotation from Bishop Wordsworth’s *Ministry of Grace*.¹ The thought suggested by it should “put us both in hope and fear.” The Bishop is speaking of the study of the Church’s history. He says : “In pursuing this great design the student must be prepared for an inevitable difficulty. It is a natural and unconscious prejudice that the

¹ Page 5 f.

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past is longer and more important than the future. We know that in ordinary experience, when we are travelling from one spot to another between sunrise and sunset, at every step we take the past part of that day grows longer and the future part shorter. We imagine that the course of human life as a whole is like this ; and though we do not know at what part of the day our own life falls, we seem bound to reflect, in accordance with the general teaching of Holy Scripture, that every minute we are farther from the dawn and nearer to the hour of sunset. Then, again, the great trouble and long expense of time which a study of history involves, and the certainty that we ourselves shall die before many years are past, impress us with the fullness of bygone years. The future looks short before us, unless we make a very serious effort to overcome the prepossession. . . . But for all that, it is a duty to remind ourselves from time to time that there is a future for the Church, possibly on this earth (I should even say probably) and certainly in the ages of eternity, which will be infinitely larger and broader in its scope than the past with all its glory has been."

V

THEOLOGICAL RE-ADJUSTMENT

SYNOPSIS

Theological Teaching is on the decrease. This is due to the need for a living Theology. Not a “new theology” but a re-adjusted theology is needed. Outline of modern attempts at the re-adjustment of the doctrines of:—

- I. Holy Scripture.
- II. The Godhead.
- III. Revelation.
- IV. Future Reward and Punishment.
- V. The Atonement.
- VI. The Resurrection.
- VII. Original Sin.
- VIII. Election and Predestination.

V

THEOLOGICAL RE-ADJUSTMENT

I AM of opinion that any thoughtful attendant at our Church Services during the last fifty years would, if examined on the sermons he had heard, be ready to assert that the sermons of to-day are much less theological than they used to be. To-day our sermons are expository of Scriptural passages ; they are biographical and historical ; they inculcate moral and religious duties ; they deal with social problems, some of them even with semi-political ones ; but theological sermons are rare indeed, although ecclesiastical ones are perhaps increasingly numerous. I regard this as "symptomatic." It is a very serious sign. It seems to indicate one of two things, either that we, as clergymen, are losing our theology, or else that we have not the power to express it in such a way as to win the interest and conviction of our hearers. If this be so, it is serious indeed, because Christian theology is the philosophy of the Christian Religion. It is that form of teaching Christianity which makes its appeal to the

reason, and earns for Christianity, not simply the respect, but, in the majority of cases, the convinced adherence of the intellectual classes of the nation. The belief that our theology is less used and so less useful to us than it was to our spiritual ancestors, is, I think, suggested by a very notable sentence in the *Edinburgh World Mission Report of 1910*. "What is needed is a living faith, and a living faith demands a living theology." Now I believe that symptom to which I have referred shows that our theology is not altogether a living theology. Indeed, I fear that it exhibits signs of dying. The reason which a biologist would assign for the lessening vital powers of an organism, is that it is getting out of harmony with its environment. Now that is what I venture to think is happening to our theology. It is getting out of harmony with its environment, or rather inasmuch as our official theology in the Church of England has been fairly stationary for some time past, we ought rather to say that our environment is getting out of harmony with our theology. Attempts, however, are being constantly made to bring about theological re-adjustment to modern knowledge and ways of thinking. I do not merely refer to that notable movement known as the "*New Theology*," because too often it is not so much re-adjustment of the Old Theology to new conditions which has been attempted there as the sweeping away of the Old Theology.

Besides, in the New Theology movement there are Pantheistic tendencies, tendencies to ignore the terrible reality of sin, to regard the historical life of our Lord as largely mythical, to identify Christian morality with State Socialism, which have created in the minds of many Christians a prejudice against any policy of theological re-adjustment, and with which therefore I should not wish at all to identify myself in this paper. At the same time I honour from my heart any man, who out of a single-minded desire to win men to the Gospel of Christ, attempts to achieve this theological re-adjustment, even if it lead him into wrong conclusions. It is one of those tasks which must be accomplished by this age, and if it is not done on sound lines it will be done on lines which are unsound—for done it will be. Dr Ballard, in the estimation of some, our ablest popular Christian apologist writing in a book recently published,¹ makes the following assertion. “The particular movement known as ‘The New Theology’ or the ‘Liberal Christian League,’ will certainly not fizzle out as some good people devoutly hope. It has not only come to stay but come to grow.” He continues, “By all, save such as are too much engrossed in mission work to have any time, or possibly disposition, to read and think, it is freely acknowledged that it is just as impossible to ignore the new movements of thought and insistings of criticism, as it

¹ *Non-Church-Going—Its Reasons and Remedies.*

is unnecessary to accept their findings without protest or modification.”¹

It is very hard in a single paper to represent adequately all the lines along which this re-adjustment has been attempted, but I would direct attention cursorily to some of them.

I

Let us notice first the attempts made—in most cases we believe with the aspiration to increase the influence of the Gospel—in the way of re-adjusting the doctrine of Holy Scripture to the needs and tendencies of the age. Formerly it was maintained that all Holy Scripture was the Word of God, and even by some, the only written Word of God in the world. We remember Dean Burgon’s magnificent affirmation. “The Bible is none other than the voice of Him that ‘sitteth upon the Throne.’ Every book of it, every chapter of it, every verse of it, every word of it, every syllable of it, every letter of it, is the direct utterance of the Most High. The Bible is none other than the Word of God, not some part of it more and some part of it less, but all alike the utterance of Him who sitteth upon the Throne, faultless, unerring, supreme.”

Many have attempted re-adjustment between

¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 134.

this view and the results achieved by modern science and historical and literary criticism. The great affirmation is still made that the Bible is the Word of God, in the sense that the Bible contains that Word of God which is clearest, highest, and most authoritative. On the other hand, it is not asserted that all the Bible is the Word of God, or that every part of it is in equal degree the Word of God, or that there are not other Words of God beside the Bible. Thus, in this case, the essential truth seems to be preserved and the adjustment in a large degree successfully accomplished.

II

Let us look next at various attempted re-adjustments of the doctrine of the Godhead. One of the most important is the insistence upon the Divine Immanence. Dr Illingworth's book was one of the most notable English contributions to that subject. The transcendence of God had been, in common with Jews, Mohammedans, Deists, and Unitarians the dominant conception of God for some centuries in England. The general acceptance of the theory of creation by evolution—as a process still in existence—seemed to compel theologians to recognise God as working in and through His creation, though not, however, to such a degree as to exclude His being

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regarded as transcendent—existing both before the universe and apart from it.

“Intra cuncta nec inclusus,
Extra cuncta nec exclusus.”

This again has reacted upon the doctrine of the Incarnation by having a tendency to cause the Incarnation to be regarded as the supreme achievement of the Divine Immanence. The attainment of the perfect type, which becomes the first of a new species. Thus the Incarnation appears as the result, not of a particular miracle, but as the outcome of an eternal purpose operating through the ages—a divine process of election and selection culminating in the greatest event in human history—that “pivot-certainty of time”—the manifestation of the Godhead in Jesus Christ. The Incarnation being viewed in this way, the Gospel genealogies, particularly the genealogy in St Luke, terminating with the words, “who was the son of Adam, who was the Son of God,” become even more significant than the Virgin Birth, as indicating one of the methods by which the Incarnation was effected.

Another adjustment of the doctrine of the Godhead has been attempted in Bishop Gore's theory of the Kenosis in his valuable essay on *The Consciousness of our Lord in His Mortal Life*. The theory that the Son “in assuming human nature, so truly entered into it as to grow and live as Son of Man under properly human

conditions, that is to say, also under properly human limitations. . . . That within the sphere and period of His incarnate and mortal life, He did cease from the exercise of those divine functions and powers, including the divine omniscience, which would have been incompatible with a truly human experience.”¹

Bishop Gore did not claim to originate this theory to meet modern needs ; the strength of the essay lies in the claim that the doctrine of the Kenosis is taught in the New Testament and is involved implicitly, if not expressed explicitly, in the teaching of the great Fathers of the Church, both of the East and of the West, and in the voices of the General Councils.

But a form of the doctrine of the Kenosis which Dr Gore applied to the second Person of the Trinity, has been attempted by way of adjustment to modern needs in the case of the First Person of the Trinity—but has not been received with anything like the same attention or appreciation.

There is a passage in John Stuart Mill’s writings in which he declares that if God the Creator be All-good, He cannot be Almighty, but that if He be Almighty, He cannot be All-good, because the vice and suffering of the world forbid our predicating both these attributes of Him as Creator. Now, presumably, with the object of helping to remove this difficulty to faith, Dr

¹ Gore, *Dissertations*, pp. 94-5.

Rashdall, as also the late Professor Momerie insisted, that the entering into creation on the part of God must of necessity involve the self-limitation of God. The nature of this limitation is very carefully expressed by Dr Rashdall in a volume of philosophical essays entitled *Personal Idealism*. "God," so Dr Rashdall asserts, "is not limited . . . by anything which does not ultimately proceed from His own Nature or Will or Power. That power is doubtless limited, and in the frank recognition of this limitation of power lies the only solution of the problem of Evil which does not either destroy the goodness of God or destroy moral distinctions altogether. . . . The limitation is a self-limitation . . . not an arbitrary self-limitation, but arising from the presence of that idea of the best that is eternally present to a will whose potentialities are limited—that idea of the best which to Platonizing Fathers and Schoolmen, became the Second Person of the Holy Trinity."¹

Re-adjustment of the Doctrine of God has also been attempted by Canon Simpson, especially in the first chapter of his book, *Fact and Faith*. There he urges that we should approach the study of the Godhead, not along the old high *a priori* road of the scholastics, but rather along the new and lowly scientific road of experience; and so learn to think of God as He has vouchsafed to reveal Himself, rather than as we think He ought

¹ Page 391.

to reveal Himself to be. Canon Simpson writes: "When we apply the term 'infinite' to the power, wisdom, and goodness of God, we are dealing with a series of ideas to which we can give no concrete reality. There is no objection to such language, provided we clearly recognise that we mean no more than transcendent, and allow ourselves to be guided in practical matters by the positive revelations of the God who hides Himself rather than by what may be supposed to follow from an absence of limitations, which at best we infer. . . . When infinite power is ascribed to the loving Wisdom of the Most High, we may be permitted to remind ourselves that Aristotle quotes with approval the poet Agathon as saying: 'This is the one thing which even God has no power to do—to make the thing done as though it had never been.'"¹

I am disposed to think that the Christian mind of the future will view these or any other re-adjustments of the Doctrine of the Godhead as permissible, which still allow us to regard the Creator as our Father; and our Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme manifestation in human form of the Will and Nature of the Godhead.

III

The Doctrine of Revelation, closely connected with the Doctrine of the Godhead, has experi-

¹ *Nic. Eth.* vi. 2.

enced various attempts at re-adjustment. The traditional view of Revelation has represented the knowledge of God as a unique system miraculously communicated from heaven to earth. Whereas modern re-adjustment strives to exhibit Revelation as implied in the very structure of the human mind, so that the processes of thought, conscience, affection truly understood, involve the recognition of the Infinite and Eternal.¹ Thus the modern theologian regards Revelation as internal—God speaking—not as a barbarous age supposed in the fire, and storm, and earthquake, but with still small voice in the human consciousness. The late Auguste Sabatier puts this view forward very clearly, “If revealers and prophets believed they heard the voice of God outside themselves, they were the victims of psychological illusion that analysis discerns and dissipates. The old theologian was right who said, ‘There is no faith save in the heart where God has first made Himself heard; and there are no divine words except those which faith hears in the inmost sanctuary of the soul.’”²

By this re-adjustment the Revelation of God is identified in its most comprehensive form with religious evolution. Both being the same thing, only viewed from opposite sides; Divine revelation from the point of view of the soul

¹ Cf. Dr E. Carpenter in Macalister's *Religion and the Modern Mind*, p. 117.

² Auguste Sabatier, *Philosophy of Religion*, pp. 54-5.

waiting upon God ; religious evolution from the point of view of the scientist investigating the universal manifestation and development of Religion.

IV

Nothing can be more notable than the way in which theological re-adjustment has been accomplished in the case of future punishment and reward. The thought of their being administered at a grand assize, when all the dead shall stand before the great White Throne, has been replaced by the conception of punishment and reward being received by way of natural consequence through the action of laws, physical, moral, intellectual, and spiritual, which execute themselves upon the wrongdoer and correspondingly promote the happiness and welfare of those that obey them. Thus the belief in a material lake of fire and brimstone has been exchanged for the belief that :—

“ A man is his own star,
His acts, his angels are
For good or ill.”

This re-adjustment has relieved theology of an enormous incubus, as the Fatherhood of God was being rendered incredible to men by the crude and materialistic teaching on this subject. To-day, the theologian preaching from the text,

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“Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap,” or from that other text, “He found no place for repentance though he sought it eagerly with tears,” can make as deep and powerful an appeal to the modern conscience, as was ever made to past generations by the preaching of “hell-fire” and “the undying worm.”

In consequence of these and other re-adjustments, the conception of the Day of Judgment has been transmuted into a process culminating at the death of the individual, and deciding the conditions under which he must enter into the future life. Hence, “the voice of the archangel” and “the trump of God” have been spiritualised, as have also the physical phenomena of earthquakes and falling stars, and blackened sun and blood-shot moon.

V

A re-adjustment of an equally acceptable character is being made in reference to the doctrine of the Atonement. “The angry God theory,” or the doctrine of Article II., that Christ “was crucified to reconcile His Father unto us,” is being exchanged for a theory which refuses to set the divine love in opposition to the divine justice, and desires to represent the atonement wrought by Christ’s life and death as being not so much *for* us as *in* us. Canon Wilson’s *Hulsean Lectures*, Canon Moberly’s

Personality and Atonement, the Rev. J. Scott Lidgett's *The Spiritual Principle of the Atonement*, Dr G. B. Steven's *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, W. F. Lofthouse's *Ethics and Atonement* are among the most notable and valuable of these attempts at re-adjustment.

VI

Another example of theological re-adjustment which has been equally successful is in connection with the Resurrection body. It is now generally recognised that Christ's risen-body was purely spiritual, and that "flesh" and "bones," notwithstanding Article IV., formed no part of that body "wherewith He ascended into Heaven." Even at the beginning of last century we are told that Bishop Horsley wrote of the Saviour's Resurrection: "The tomb was not opened to let the Saviour out, but to let the women in," and again—and this could not happen in the case of a body of flesh and bones—"The accounts all show that He was invisible save to the eye of faith."¹ But this view of the Saviour's Resurrection, together with the knowledge that the material particles of our bodies change every seven years, has led to an entire re-adjustment of the doctrine of our own Resurrection. It is no

¹ *Sermons*, p. 167f., 1810. Quoted by Dean Fremantle in *Natural Christianity*.

longer generally taught that the body placed in the grave will rise again, or that there will be what has been called "a resurrection of relics." As a consequence, the teaching of 2 *Cor.* v. 1-10, of "a spiritual house not made with hands," has in some cases replaced, where perhaps it is not altogether clear, the teaching of 1 *Cor.* xv., and certainly the doctrine in the Baptismal Creed of "the Resurrection of the flesh."¹

In connection with theological re-adjustment in the case of the Resurrection, we may notice a similar movement with regard to the Ascension. Owing to heaven and hell having been transmuted from localities into states or conditions, the Ascension is not now generally regarded as a local upward transition of our Lord's frame, as Bishop Pearson expounded, but rather as the passing from one condition of existence into another, as Bishop Harvey Goodwin taught. This has also helped to effect a re-adjustment in the case of the Second Advent. The Johannine view, expressed in the Fourth Gospel, of the coming of the spiritual presence of Christ into the heart of the believer, is taking the place of the Messianic Apocalyptic conception which we see in the early chapters of the Acts and in other places in the New Testament. The coming of Christ or the Parousia for which we pray, and work, and look, is realised in the Coming of God's Kingdom, and in the doing of His Will on earth

¹ But see *Church Quarterly Review* of April, 1909, p. 138f.

as it is done in heaven, not in the occurrence of phenomena in the physical earth and heavens, when

“Solvat saeculum in favilla
Teste David et Sibylla.”

VII

Again, some notable attempts have been made at theological re-adjustment in connection with the doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin. Dr Tennant has been the chief worker in this department, as seen in his books, *The Fall and Original Sin*, and *The Origin of Sin*. Dr Orchard's book on *Original Sin* is also a valuable supplement to Dr Tennant's work. To achieve re-adjustment with modern knowledge or scientific theories, Dr Tennant would substitute for the doctrine or conception of original sin the “survival in ourselves of inherited animal propensities.” For “original righteousness” (which we are apt to forget, is its partner) he would substitute a non-moral condition of innocence or unawakened moral consciousness. “Inherited guilt” he would dismiss altogether, for since sin is the outcome of the action of the individual will, then to incur the guilt of sin there must be an act of will, but of such an act of will we cannot regard the new-born babe as capable, and therefore as deserving though but a span long to sprawl upon the floor of hell. This view of Original Sin in no way affects the need

and value of the Sacrament of Baptism, if that Sacrament be explained in accordance with the teaching of Robertson of Brighton, and of Dr A W. Robinson in his *Church Catechism Explained*.

There is much truth in Dr Tennant's assertion that "The basis of a Gospel of redemption is the fact of the universality of sin and sinful habit; how sin arose in the race or in the individual, and by what means its spread is effected, are matters of no moment at all." A knowledge of the origin of sin and the means by which sin is propagated is of importance; but of only secondary importance compared with the realisation of the nature of sin and the way by which it may be eradicated. When this is once realised, then it will be possible to accept Dr Tennant's conclusion "that the doctrines of the Fall and Original Sin are essential to the Christian Faith is quite erroneous and gratuitous."¹ But when such a view becomes common among the laity of the Church of England, it will involve some alteration in the Prayer Book Baptismal Services.

VIII

We know also how the kindred doctrines of Election and Predestination have gradually been re-adjusted from their Reformation position. Election is no longer regarded as having reference

¹ *Original Sin*, p. 33 in *Essays for the Times*.

to an eternity of joy or woe sealed for the individual by its inscrutable action. Election is shown in accordance with Old Testament and New Testament teaching to refer to God's providential government of the world in the department of human history, wherein by the operation of His Divine Spirit, He selects men—like Abraham, or Moses, or Isaiah, or St Paul, or Martin Luther, to become fellow-workers with Him in achieving His purposes. But we must also believe, if we are not to impugn the Divine justice, that they are chosen because they have become by voluntary moral and religious effort more suitable agents for the Divine purpose than their fellows. On the other hand, others who oppose the Divine Will are overthrown in their gainsaying, because they separate themselves from the Source of Life, and get out of line with the process of moral and spiritual evolution. But the operation of this election is in the sphere of human history, and the election is not primarily to the reward of eternal life beyond the grave, but to great and signal work for God in this life, and to the joy and fulness of life which go with it.

Predestination, by being made "single," and not "double," a predestination to life for all (which life the individual alone can forfeit in direct opposition to the good will of God), loses its power to excite any feeling of abhorrence in the modern mind, but rather comes into line as the theological way of expressing the higher

purpose of the evolutionary process which is being achieved on this planet.

This sketch (brief as it is) of the process of theological re-adjustment may not be pursued further here. It is not the conclusions which are of supreme importance. These must, of necessity, be modified from age to age. What is of supreme importance is whether every teacher of religion in the National Church realises the need for theological re-adjustment, and so will be ready first to face these issues with an open mind, and then will strive in his own department with single-minded and unrelenting diligence to accomplish it.

There is no need, with Procrustean rigour, to rack and mutilate every dogma of the Christian faith to make it fit in with every tendency and theory of the modern world, but there is need that those who feel that the Holy Spirit is speaking to men in this age through the events of history and discoveries of science, should learn the means by which the new knowledge, if not rendered the handmaid of theology according to the mediæval ideal, may at least prove to be her sister and her companion, and not her enemy.

In noting briefly these attempts at theological re-adjustment, I feel that all are worthy of the serious attention of those who are earnest and thoughtful teachers of the Christian religion in a Reformed Church. At the first Reformation in the sixteenth century, with incredible pains

and many backward glances, we left behind us in our theological re-adjustment much which had been revered and regarded as of the very essence of the Faith by the generations which had gone before. At the second Reformation in the twentieth we shall have to do likewise. Indeed, unless trusting in the guidance of that Spirit Who alone can lead us into all truth, we make a very diligent and faithful use of that power of theological re-adjustment which we possess as a Reformed Church, it seems impossible that we shall be able to retain within our fold the great bulk of the nation And if not we, who ?

VI

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE
BIBLE

SYNOPSIS

Historical Summary of Biblical Interpretation.

- I. By Christ.
- II. St Paul.
- III. In the second and third centuries. (1) forensic ;
(2) allegorical ; (3) historical methods.
- IV. Mediæval and Reformation periods. (1) Bibliolatry ;
(2) Ecclesiolatry.
- V. Where is the Church's authoritative interpretation of
Scripture to be found? In the Fathers, the Creeds,
and the Councils of the undivided Church. In-
sufficiency of this view. (1) It limits the action of
the Holy Spirit ; (2) assigns an exaggerated authority
to the past.
- VI. Another View. Four Canons of Interpretation.
- VII. (a) Moral and religious as well as intellectual qualities
needful for the interpreter ; (b) The ecclesiastical
conditions needful for fruitful interpretation.

VI

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

THE study of history not only adds to our knowledge and strengthens our judgment, but it also frees the mind from narrow prejudice and the limitations of the age and locality in which we live. I am sure, therefore, that the best possible way of studying the interpretation of Scripture is to study it historically and to try and learn what were the methods of interpretation in use in the Christian Church in past ages and their bearing upon our present methods.¹ Such a study would not only include the origin and development of methods of interpretation but also an estimate of their worth as judged by their results. I feel that though the history of interpretation is a theme for a book rather than for a paper, I

¹ Benjamin Jowett's essay *On the Interpretation of Scripture*, in *Essays and Reviews*, Dean Farrar's Bampton lectures on the *History of Interpretation*, G. H. Gilbert's *Interpretation of the Bible* (Macmillan's, 1908), are the best worth reading of books in English on this subject.

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must introduce my subject by attempting a very brief sketch of it.

I

Any historical study of the interpretation of Scripture must begin with a careful study of our Lord's method of interpreting the Old Testament. The more we know of the current Jewish interpretation of our Lord's age the more are we impressed by our Lord's originality and unfailing spiritual insight as an interpreter of the Old Testament. He treated it with authority. Where it served His purpose He quoted it; where it did not, He corrected and superseded it. Thus He uses its words as teaching the primal duties of the worship and love of God and the love and service of our neighbour.¹ He uses it to exhibit God's demand for a pure and spiritual religion; for a religion which must be a matter of the heart rather than of the tongue; for a religion which is required to show itself in love and justice rather than in ritual sacrifice.² He declares that miracles will not win to righteousness and mercy those whom Moses and the prophets cannot persuade.³ He appeals to the Old Testament history of Israel as revealing that

¹ *Matt.* iv. 10; *Luke* iv. 8; *Matt.* xix. 19; xxii. 37; *Luke* x. 27; *Mark* xii. 30, etc.

² *Matt.* xv. 9 f.; *Mark* vii. 7-8; *Matt.* ix. 13; xii. 7.

³ *Luke* xvi. 29-31.

the love and interest of God are not limited by merely local and national bounds.¹ He uses that same history as exhibiting in the fates of the prophets the law of vicarious suffering, and as pointing forward to the rejection and death of the Messiah.² He quotes the prophetic condemnation of the hardened blindness of Israel in the past as an apt description of its present condition,³ and cites the cases of the repentance of Nineveh and the religious interest of the Queen of Sheba as examples of graces which were not found in His own generation. He silences those who object to the resurrection as inconsistent with Scripture by showing that they have an imperfect knowledge of that Scripture which they accept as authoritative.⁴ He quotes a Psalm as foreshowing His final triumph and the overthrow of His opponents,⁵ and another Psalm traditionally quoted entraps those who unwarily schemed to entrap Him.⁶ Where, however, the teaching of the Old Testament was below His moral and spiritual ideals, as, for instance, in its teaching upon divorce and the *jus talionis*, He did not hesitate to supersede it, or to deepen it by re-interpreting it, as in the cases of the prohibition to murder and adultery.

¹ *Luke* iv. 25-28.

² *Matt.* xxiii. 27-37 ; *Mark* viii. 12 f. ; *Luke* xiii. 33, etc.

³ *Mark* iv. 12 ; *Matt.* xiii. 13 ; *Luke* viii. 9.

⁴ *Mark* xii. 18 f. ; *Matt.* xxii. 23 f. ; *Luke* xx. 27 f.

⁵ *Mark* xii. 10 ; *Matt.* xxi. 42 f. ; *Luke* xx. 17 f.

⁶ *Mark* xii. 35 f. ; *Matt.*, xxii. 42 f. ; *Luke* xx. 41.

II

The next point to note in our historical study of interpretation is the interpretation of the Old Testament by the New Testament writers generally. Of these St Paul is the most important. His interpretation, though exhibiting deep spiritual insight, has not the originality and consummate authority which mark our Lord's, for he is partly influenced by his Rabbinical education.

In a brief and valuable essay on St Paul's use of the Old Testament, Dr Sanday has written two weighty sentences, which sum up the essayist's practical conclusions. "Any incorrectness of his (St Paul's) exegesis that there may be, lies not in the ideas themselves but in finding them in passages which have probably a different meaning." "The value of St Paul's exegesis therefore lies not in his true interpretation of individual passages, but in his insight into the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament; we need not use his methods, but the books of the Bible will have little value for us if we are not able to see in them the spiritual teaching which he saw."¹

This is exactly what may be said of the other New Testament writers as interpreters of the Old Testament. And the lesson their efforts teach us is this:—Get by your own interpretation the

¹ See Sanday and Headlam's *Romans*, p. 302 f.

spiritual teaching from the Old Testament that they got from it ; get even more if you can, and employ it with equal practical insight to meet the moral and religious needs of your age ; but do not feel bound to make use of their methods, which in certain cases are unhistorical, and are oftentimes the merely temporary products of their age, and above all do not feel bound to defend their methods as flawless and eternal.

III

All this, did space permit, should be demonstrated and illustrated, but it is necessary now to pass rapidly from the New Testament period into that great age or succession of ages which practically closes with the last of the four General Councils (451 A.D.).

During this period there were, to speak generally, three methods of interpretation in the Church.

(1) The *literalistic* or *forensic* method which the Church inherited from Palestinian Rabbinism, and which she practised with the able assistance of a succession of Roman advocates and lawyers who mainly regarded the Bible as a Divine law-book, and God as the great law-giver, always guided by forensic principles. An example of this method in our New Testament is seen in St Paul's argument in *Gal.* iii. 16 f., based on the distinction between "seed" and "seeds."

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(2) The *allegorical* or *mystical* method which the Church inherited from Alexandrian Judaistic Hellenism. This method came into Judaistic Hellenism from the Greek philosophers, who used it in their interpretation of Homer and the tragic poets.¹ It paid no regard to the literal sense of the passage, and got strange and wonderful and indeed sometimes very beautiful and helpful lessons from Scriptural texts, of which the original writers had not the remotest idea. For it the saying was but too true, *Hic liber est in quo quaerit sua dogmata quisque, Invenit et pariter dogmata quisque sua.*

An example of this method in the New Testament is seen in St Paul's allegory of the "son of the bond - woman" and "the son of the free-woman."² The brief *Epistle of Barnabas*, written in the sub-apostolic age, furnishes many examples of it.

(3) The *historical* method. This method is pre-eminently Christian. It grew up in the great school of Antioch which "produced some of the greatest exegetes of the ancient Church." Of them Dr H. B. Swete writes: "All were diligent students of Holy Scripture; all brought to the study of Scripture a healthy freedom from conventional methods of interpretation, approaching it from the side of grammar and of history."³

We cannot weigh the value of each of these

¹ Cf. Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures*, 1888, Lecture III.

² *Gal.* iv. 21-31.

³ *Patristic Study*, p. 8.

methods. It is obvious that the last was best. "It is," as Dr Salmon writes, "the commentators of this school which have produced the only exegetical works which a modern student can read continuously with pleasure and profit."¹ It survived until "the question of exegesis became entangled with the question of orthodoxy," when it died under suspicion of heresy.²

Though the great writers of these periods produced much of value in their interpretation of Scripture, their work is by no means perfect and incapable of improvement. To note but one of the obvious disadvantages under which they laboured: "Patristic exegesis," says Dr H. B. Swete, "suffers in the case of the Old Testament from the prevalent ignorance of Hebrew. . . . The expositions of the Greek Fathers are based upon a version, and those of the Latin Fathers (with the partial exception of Jerome) upon the version of a version. Accordingly their interpretation not seldom rests on a false rendering of the original. The situation is not improved by the unrestricted use of the allegorical method which commended itself to the majority of the ancient commentators both Eastern and Western."³

¹ *Infallibility of the Church*, 3rd ed., p. 166.

² Cf. Hatch, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

³ *Patristic Study*, p. 153.

IV

The period extending from the sixth to the fifteenth centuries was, from the point of view of Biblical study, largely one of stagnation ; it contributed practically nothing of any permanent value — though many curiosities — to the history of interpretation. In the Western Church, Scripture was relegated to a subordinate position, and was chiefly interpreted as supporting the mediæval conceptions of the Holy Roman Church and the Holy Roman Empire. For example, Boniface VIII. interpreted the two swords carried by St Peter, of which Christ said “It is enough,” as meaning “the double power, spiritual and temporal, of the Popes.”¹ The period of the Reformation once more concentrated men’s attention upon the Scriptures, and the conflicting theories of that period in regard to the authority and interpretation of Scripture are reflected in the English Church to-day. Speaking in general terms, these disputes may be said to have issued in two distinct views of the nature of Holy Scripture, and of the relation of Holy Scripture to the Church, which I will briefly summarise.

(1) The first of these views was the belief in the Bible as a book uniquely, plenarily, and verbally inspired ; a divine book complete in all

¹ Cf. Loisy, *The Gospel and the Church*, p. 220.

its parts ; a book so sacred that all other literature was profane in the light of its sacredness ; a book which contained a revelation written for all practical intents and purposes by the finger of God Himself ; a revelation so perfect, so certain, so unique, that all other revelations of God besides, whether in the individual conscience, or in the world of Nature, or in the history of humanity and of the Church, were as nothing in comparison ; a book of such absolute truthfulness, whether it deals with ethics and theology, or astronomy and natural science, or history and archæology, that whosoever—be he philosopher, scientist, moralist, or historian—contradicts its statements on any one of these points is *ipso facto* a profane and daring atheist. This view of the Bible, which we may call Bibliolatry, and which was not unlike that which later Judaism took of the Mosaic Law, is the view which has greatly attracted extreme Protestants, combined in their case with the assertion of the right of the individual to be the authoritative interpreter of Scripture. Perhaps it may not be out of place to remark that Bibliolatry is as definitely involved in the Tridentine and Vatican decrees, and even in the Encyclical *Pascendi* of the present Pope, as in any of the Protestant formularies.

We see an aspect of Bibliolatry expressed in Chillingworth's famous dictum : " The Bible and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants."

The vice of this view was that of pious exaggeration—a vice which it is easy to develop, hard to recognise, and harder still to rebuke, for who would readily rebuke Satan when he comes in the guise of an angel of light? Its inherent defect—its *damnosa hereditas*—is that it makes the religion of our Lord the religion of a book. It makes the Christian life a matter of obedience to the letter rather than of obedience to the Spirit. It deprives the Christian consciousness of all elasticity and freedom, of all idea of the possibility of religious progress, and of the recognition of that duty of theological development and re-statement which lies upon the Church. It tends to remove the Christian interpreter of Scripture from the realm of growing ideas and of modern scientific knowledge, and so makes him of necessity a re-actionary and an obscurantist. In short, it stunts, hardens, narrows, and legalises the Church or individual who holds it consistently and strongly. The commentaries and interpretations of Scripture which have been issued by those who have held it in an extreme form are practically worthless to-day, and he who troubles to read them except as literary or theological curiosities is really wasting his time. But perhaps the greatest objection of all to this conception of the Bible is that it is not true. In consequence it has been utterly shattered by the conclusions of modern physical science and of modern historical research.

No modern scholar interprets the Bible in the light, or rather in the darkness, of a theory of plenary verbal inspiration. No educated man to-day interprets the Bible as necessarily accurate in its scientific, historical, and archæological statements—they merely reflect for him the knowledge of an unscientific age and nation. No modern Christian moralist regards every command attributed therein to God as necessarily ethical or binding upon Christians (*e.g.*, prohibitions of usury and eating blood). No modern Christian philosopher regards all the conceptions of God put forth in the Bible, or the qualities, motives, and actions attributed therein to Him, as necessarily His.

And here let me say that if we are to become able interpreters of the Bible we must adopt this position also, otherwise our ability to win the men of our age to Christ will be small indeed. If the Christian teacher is to interpret Holy Scripture adequately, he must at least refuse "to vilify reason, which," as Bishop Butler has said, "is the candle of the Lord within us, and that by which alone we judge of revelation itself." Therefore the modern Christian teacher must not worship the Bible in the old way. He must not regard it as infallible. He must not regard it as having authority outside the moral and spiritual spheres. He must not regard the account of the divine revelation therein contained as so sufficient that earnest recourse may

not be had to God's revelation in conscience, history, Nature, and the Church, and to even the teachings of the other great religions, for divine lessons which, though as I believe they add nothing to the revelation contained in Scripture, yet do wonderfully confirm and illustrate and enforce it.

(2) The second of these views which have a bearing upon the interpretation of Holy Scripture is the one which regards the Church as supreme over Scripture. She has the power to decide what is to be regarded as Scripture and what is not to be so regarded, and she may even elevate ecclesiastical tradition to an equal position with Scripture. She alone has the power to interpret Scripture adequately, authoritatively, and indeed infallibly. The individual Christian has no power to do this, and moreover should he not accept the Church's interpretation he is a schismatic and a heretic. This view we may call Ecclesiolatry. Just as Bibliolatry to-day has in a milder form a special attraction for Anglican Low Churchmen and their congeners, so Ecclesiolatry in a milder form has a peculiar attraction for Anglican High Churchmen and their congeners. And just as Bibliolatry errs largely through excess of reverence for the letter of Scripture, so Ecclesiolatry errs through excess of reverence for the authority and office of the Church. And just as Bibliolatry has a large element of truth in it, viz., that the Scriptures do contain a supreme revelation of

the Divine Nature, so Ecclesiolatry has large elements of truth in it.

They are these :—

(1) The interpretation of Holy Scripture which is supported by the general consensus of enlightened Christian opinion is in the majority of cases to be preferred to the interpretations of the individual.

(2) “The Church,” as Article XX. tells us, is “a witness and keeper (*testis et conservatrix*) of Holy Writ.”

For (*a*) the testimony of the Church to the genuineness and authenticity of the books of the New Testament is of considerable value to any one who would investigate these difficult matters.

(*b*) The Church is a keeper of Holy Writ, for she has preserved it with pious care from early times, and has read, transcribed, commented on, and published it, even in those bitter days when to refuse to be a *traditor* was to court persecution.

(*c*) The Church settled what were to be regarded as Canonical books of the New Testament, and that chiefly on the ground that they were attributed to apostles and apostolic men of authority and influence in the Primitive Church. The various factors in the process of selection are well summed up in the words of Professor G. A. Smith : “This selection was effected . . . partly by the spiritual taste and insight of the various congregations, partly on the strength of

tradition, and partly by the opinions and discussions of the doctors of the Church.”¹

(d) Moreover, the very existence of the Church with her apostolic ministry and ordinances, her observance of the two primal Sacraments and the Lord’s Day, her Creed and her hymns, her message and her history, do attest the historical basis upon which the New Testament writings rest.

But these facts do not for the modern mind constitute the Church an infallible interpreter of Holy Scripture. Article XXI. tells us that “General Councils . . . may err, and sometimes have erred, even in things pertaining unto God.” And Article XIX. declares that “as the Church of Hierusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch have erred, so also the Church of Rome hath erred, not only in their living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith.” In the face of such declarations, which can be proved to be historically correct, can we regard the Anglican Communion, even though it be “the most splendid Church of Christendom,” as infallible? Certainly we cannot. The Church, though we may regard her as having existed before the New Testament, and as having in one sense given the New Testament to us, yet is she neither as a whole nor in any of her branches supreme over it, neither is she its infallible interpreter.

The relation of the Church to Holy Writ is the

¹ *Modern Criticism and Preaching of the Old Testament*, p. 6.

relation of one of His Majesty's judges to the laws of this realm. His function on the bench is not legislative but judicial. He sits there, not to make law but to interpret it and to administer it, and that, too, in accordance with certain well-known legal principles.

The Church, then, is not supreme over Holy Writ, and she is its authoritative interpreter only when she interprets it in accordance with certain clearly-defined principles.

We may add that although not an infallible interpreter, yet she may be, in accordance with our Lord's promise, an inspired interpreter of Holy Scripture. Infallibility is a mechanical quality like accuracy in a calculating machine. Inspiration is a moral and spiritual quality, and it is variable and conditional.

It depends on the attitude of the recipient towards the source of inspiration and this attitude is a religious attitude. It stands in reverence, prayer, obedience, and the earnest practical application of all knowledge which inspiration vouchsafes, and which is thus no mere revelation of knowledge but is rather a revelation of duty. Moreover, inspiration, though hard to define, can always be recognised in the influence it produces. An inspired book of the highest kind leads men upward to the good, and holy, and true—to the very throne of God—and the inspired interpretation of such a book must do the same.

V

But in speaking of the Church as an interpreter of Holy Scripture I am immediately beset by two difficulties. What is the Church, and where is its authoritative interpretation of Scripture to be found ?

This is a hard question to answer, for each religious body has its own conception of the nature and limits of the Church.

The Roman Catholic will tell you that the Church is his own communion. The Anglo-Catholic will confine it to the three great branches of the Church—Latin, Greek, and Anglican—all other Christian bodies he regards as

“Petulant, capricious sects—
The maggots of corrupted texts.”

Almost all the various Protestant non-episcopal bodies have exchanged the ideal of one visible Church for an invisible Church typified on earth by an agglomeration of “Churches,” each of which enjoys various degrees of authority and illumination.

The Greek Orthodox Church regards itself as the legitimate heir of all the Christian ages, and has not definitely decided as to the exact *locus standi* of other Christian bodies.

Where, then, is the Church, and where is its authoritative interpretation of Scripture to be found ?

Now an answer which satisfies many in our own communion is this :—

You may find it in the undivided Church of the first four General Councils, acknowledged as authoritative by all the great communions of Christendom, and in the writings of the ancient Fathers and Doctors of the Church. I do not like this artificial division. Is there no Church since then? Practically not for purposes of ecumenical decisions, it is replied. There has been no united authoritative voice of the Church since. I turn to the writings of the Church of the first five centuries for my interpretation of Holy Scripture. Its commentaries, homilies, apologies, etc., contain great variety of interpretation, but I find, however, a general agreement upon certain great principles or truths. They do not extend much further than the articles of the Nicene-Chalcedonian Creed. Hence if this principle be accepted then I should get as my first canon of interpretation :—

The Church and the individual may not interpret Scripture so as to make it conflict with the great truths affirmed by the Nicene-Chalcedonian Creed.

Those truths are few and are clearly defined, and inasmuch as they may be regarded as fundamental to Christianity, Scripture may not be interpreted so as to contradict them.

But I do not like this answer, for it does not sufficiently recognise two great truths which the

Church of the future will see more clearly than the Church of the present.

(1) First, that "the spirit of God has not yet ceased to speak to men, and that it is important for us to know, not only what He told the men of other days, but also what He tells us now. Interpretation is of the present as well as of the past. We can believe that there is a divine voice, but we find it hard to believe that it has died away to an echo from the Judæan hills," or to a whisper from the judgment halls of the four great General Councils. We can believe in religious as in other progress, but we find it hard to believe that that progress was suddenly arrested fifteen hundred years ago.¹ To accept the fifth-century conclusions as final is really to set an arbitrary limit to the promise of Christ and to restrict the Holy Ghost in His power to illuminate mankind.

(2) Secondly, that the Church of the past is in the matter of knowledge not so much the mother of the present Church as she is its child, and the Fathers and Doctors of the ancient Church, though worthy of our reverence for the treasures they have imparted to us, would be the first to realise if they were living here to-day that we have even richer gifts to offer them. Rich with the experience and study of the past, laden with an enormous collection of modern knowledge, strong and fearless in the possession and application

¹ Cf. Dr Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures*, 1888, p. 84.

of the scientific method by a growing army of experts, the interpreter of Scripture to-day is placed in a position to discover its meaning, to investigate its sources, to test its truthfulness, to apply its principles, with an experience, an insight, a courage, a breadth and length of outlook which the Church of the past was never privileged to possess. God grant that he may also have the same unwavering faith, the same deep reverence, the same untiring energy, the same disinterested love !

The conclusions of the Church of the first five centuries must not therefore necessarily bind the Church of later ages as an interpreter of Holy Scripture.

VI

I have compared the relation which exists between the Church and Scripture to that relation which exists between a judge and the laws of the realm, and I have said that the judge must interpret the law according to certain fixed principles—those principles need not be defined here, but we know that they must be in the final analysis rational and moral. Now let me change the simile—the relation of the Church or the individual to the Bible is that of the scientist to Nature. The scientist interrogates Nature to discover her laws, and, as Bacon assures us, she answers him truly. So the would-be interpreter

of Scripture stands in the presence of Scripture and puts his questions. But before the scientist interrogates Nature he has come to certain conclusions about Nature. He has decided that Nature is a fit subject for investigation by a rational being, and that she has certain truths in the form of laws which she will disclose to him if he enquires in the right way. *Prudens quæstio dimidium scientiæ*. A wise question is half the answer.

Now the interpreter of Scripture must have his principles or necessary presuppositions also. He must believe in divine inspiration as a reality, and that God has revealed himself through the history of Israel and in the utterance of her prophets and Psalmists, and above all in the character and teaching of our Lord as set forth in Scripture.¹

This, therefore, would constitute the first of my four canons of interpretation :—

CANON I.

He who would interpret Scripture must believe that inspiration, or the influence of the Spirit of God on human personalities is a reality, and that Scripture witnesses to and contains an account of such an influence.

CANON II.

He who would interpret Scripture must interpret it as containing a progressive revelation of the

¹ Cf. Sanday, *Inspiration*, p. 445.

Divine Will and Nature which reaches its highest point and clearest manifestation in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ.

These are assumptions which the interpreter's succeeding investigations will confirm. But just as it is important for any modern biologist to adopt at the outset of his work the theory of the evolution of species as his working hypothesis because of the light it will throw on all the various phenomena which he investigates, so with the interpreter of Scripture the adoption of the working hypothesis that the Bible contains a progressive revelation of God, which culminates in Christ, will prove to him to be the master light of all his seeing, and will guide him through difficulties which otherwise might lead him into serious error.

In our Scriptural records of our Lord's teaching there may be difficulties of interpretation arising from inaccurate and imperfect reports, consciously or unconsciously coloured by the limitations of the evangelists, there may even be in them misleading additions to, and mistaken paraphrases of, Christ's words, and even acts attributed to Him which were not His. If this be so, and the future will declare it, it will not affect our working hypothesis; indeed it may even throw it into clearer light that the personality and teaching of Christ are for human beings the highest and final revelation of God and duty.

Such a view of the Christian revelation, by

keeping steadily before the eyes of the Church a historical, authoritative, practical standard of creed and conduct, can alone deliver her from yielding to those temptations of a false spiritualism, a vague mysticism, a speculative gnosticism, an alluring asceticism, a deadening materialism, an easy utilitarianism, which beset her at all times and on all sides in her work of interpreting the Divine Will to mankind.

Such a canon of interpretation has the support of Article VI. : "Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation, so that whatsoever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby is not to be required by any man that it should be believed as an article of the faith, or be thought requisite necessary to salvation." It has also the support of Article VII. : "The Old Testament is not contrary to the New, for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ."

CANON III.

The interpreter of Scripture must not expound one place of Scripture, that it be repugnant to another. (This principle is asserted in Article XX.).

This canon will include the following sub-rules :—

(a) The doubtful and obscure passages must be interpreted in the light of the plain and undoubted — *e.g.*, the statements about the Millennium in the Apocalypse must be inter-

preted in the light of our Lord's teaching about the nature and coming of the Kingdom of God. Article XVII. enunciates this principle when it asserts that "in our doings, that will of God is to be followed which we have expressly (*diserte*, *i.e.*, clearly) set forth to us in Holy Scripture."

(b) The limited and partial must be interpreted in the light of the universal and eternal—*e.g.*, the declaration, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the House of Israel," must be interpreted in the light of such a statement as "God . . . willeth all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth."

Article XVII. enunciates this principle also when it declares that "We must receive God's promises in such wise as they be generally (*generaliter*, *i.e.*, universally) set forth to us in Holy Scripture."

(c) Passages which reflect a lower moral and religious ideal must be interpreted in the light of the higher.

This, of course, follows in consequence of our recognising that revelation is progressive, and that the degree of inspiration varies in the different writers of Scripture. Indeed were this rule not observed, an interpretation of Scripture might often be obtained which would present an unworthy conception of God and a low ideal of duty, which has been transcended by Christ's teaching. It is this principle—so finely expressed in Aristotle's maxim that "The nature of a thing

is what it is, when its becoming has been completed"—which guides the modern interpreter in solving such difficulties as the writer of the Clementine Homilies portrays in the following passage:—

“Far be it from us to believe that the Master of the universe, the Maker of heaven and earth, ‘tempts’ men as though He did not know—for who then does foreknow? and if He ‘repents,’ who is perfect in thought and firm in judgment? and if He ‘hardens’ men’s hearts, who makes them wise? and if He ‘blinds’ them, who makes them to see? and if He desires a ‘fruitful hill,’ whose then are all things? and if He wants the savour of sacrifices, who is it that needeth nothing? and if He delights in ‘lamps,’ who is He that set the stars in heaven?”¹

CANON IV.

The interpreter of Scripture must not interpret any passage or doctrine of Scripture in such a way as to make it necessary or desirable for any one who receives such interpretation to believe what is contrary to truth as revealed by modern science and historical research or indeed in any other way.

Aristotle tells us what is obvious when he asserts that one thing that is true cannot be in conflict with another thing that is true. But, you say, they may appear in conflict owing to our imperfect knowledge. Certainly. But this is a

¹ Hatch, *Hibbert Lectures*, 1888, p. 71.

dangerous road by which to retreat, and may easily land you in obscurantism or scepticism. It is a sound working hypothesis in the great majority of cases that where statements of apparent truth are in conflict one of them is not true. Too often, alas, the Church, owing to her misconception of the nature and scope of Scripture, and to no small ignorance of the methods and results of scientific and historical studies, has, as she believed, entered into conflict on behalf of the eternal truth against "Science falsely so called," to discover after a disastrous encounter that the eternal truth was being defended by her adversaries and the "Science falsely so-called" by herself. The popularly-named "fights between science and religion" are for the most part fights between the knowledge of the age that is past and the knowledge of the age that has come, or rather between old error and new science. Hardly anything has done more to discredit the Church than these conflicts. It was this fact which made Huxley say that the cradle of infant science was surrounded by the strangled snakes of dead theologies.

Let us then hesitate to oppose the assured results of science and history. Even where those results are not assured but tentative, let us if possible adopt a sympathetic attitude towards them and try to take them into account in our interpretations of Scripture, lest haply we

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be found to be fighting against God. Every interpreter of Holy Scripture should keep before him Bishop Lightfoot's ideal: "It is my sole desire in great things and in small to be found συνεργὸς τῇ ἀληθείᾳ."¹

VII

This is the last of my canons. But canons of interpretation are not all. There are certain moral and religious qualities necessary for the would-be interpreter of Scripture if he would use these canons adequately in his work.

The qualities necessary are :—

(a) Such moral and religious qualities as are evinced by constant prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, with a deep experience of the reality of the spiritual world.

(b) A pastoral spirit. A real desire to feed spiritually and morally those committed to his charge. Some of them — the aged and the ignorant — will not need the type of Scriptural interpretation which I have foreshadowed. They are getting from Scripture all they need for life and godliness. Nothing further is necessary for them. On the other hand, how many are there who are not getting from the interpretation of Scripture what they most need? If we make no effort to supply this need, Christ's woe pro-

¹ *Essays on Supernatural Religion*, Preface, p. 9.

nounced against the Scribes falls on us : “ Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, for ye have taken away the key of knowledge. Ye enter not in yourselves, and them that would enter in ye hinder.” To make use of this key of knowledge there must be in the Christian scribe :—

(1) The unselfish desire to use it, so that he may be “ apt to teach.”

(2) The heroic quality of courage, for the use of the key demands much self-denial, and incurs the perils which attend a passage from the old world to the new.

(3) Glad and unceasing diligence in our study of Scripture, remembering the vow which we take on receiving Priest's Orders to be “ diligent in reading of the Holy Scripture, and in such studies as help to the knowledge of the same.”

(4) A wise and cautious choice and use of the best guides.

“ Exact his test,
Of what is best in books, as what books best.”

But besides the canons of interpretation and the moral qualities necessary to use them rightly, there must be certain conditions suitable for their exercise, which it is the duty of the authorities of the Church to create and maintain.

(1) In order that the Scriptural interpretation suitable for this age may be given, we must have education for the clergy on modern lines, and they must have some degree of leisure for study.

A special class of knowledge is necessary to interpret adequately each division of our Scriptures—laws, prophets, histories, psalms, gospels, epistles, apocalypses. To take the last, for example. No one, I venture to think, will grasp the general character and, as I believe, the essential value of the Apocalypse of St John without having studied the volumes of Jewish apocalypses edited by Dr R. H. Charles. The natural precedes the spiritual, and a sound knowledge of large classes of facts is necessary before we can see our Scriptures whole and the various portions of them clearly and in due proportion. When we can do this they will be full of moral and spiritual lessons of inestimable value.

(2) In order that the interpretation of Scripture adequate to this age may be given, absolute freedom is necessary for the interpreters. No science has ever thriven without it. All may not have the leisure and gifts and energy necessary for the study of interpretation, but at least let such try to cultivate a spirit of tolerance and sympathy. I know that it is very hard to do this. "No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new." Sympathy and tolerance towards the new interpreter are needful, for his task is one of great difficulty, and he is compassed with infirmity.

His reward, however, is more than sufficient, if he be the bearer of precious things for his brethren, which he believes God of His bounty

has entrusted to him to distribute. If the interpretation of such an one—enlightened by using the best methods, enlightened by diligently seeking true knowledge, enlightened by a spirit of love, courage, humility, and reverence—is vouchsafed to us, shall we recognise it as authoritative? To doubt that were to doubt whether we have the power to recognise and to love the truth. Such an interpretation the enlightened Christian consciousness will recognise as inspired. Its inspiration will be manifest in the effect which it produces. It will need no Ecumenical Councils to confirm it by decrees or to protect it by anathemas. It will prevail as all truth—physical, historical, moral, and spiritual—prevails, because that is its prerogative.

VII
THE KINGDOM OF GOD

SYNOPSIS

- I. Difficulty of ascertaining Christ's ideal of the Kingdom.
His ideal must have been self-consistent and original;
it gives no evidence of alteration during the period
of His Ministry.
- II. The Kingdom, the chief subject of Christ's teaching,
yet neglected and perverted by Christian teachers.
Perversions: Apocalypticism, Papalism, Ecclesiasticism.
- III. Reason of this corruption. Difficulty of the ideal,
hence "the Faith" and "the Church" substituted
for it.
- IV. Description of Christ's ideal of the kingdom.
- V. Bearing of this ideal on current Church doctrines and
practices.

VII

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

I

MY purpose is primarily practical. This paper is not intended for scholars—scholars would demand much more than they could find here. I have felt, however, that there is little use in treating so profound a subject as the Kingdom of God without attempting to indicate its bearing upon our everyday work and thought—our Church services and our Church policy. We are in the early years of a century which will witness enormous changes in the ordinary conception of the character and essence of Christianity. As to whether the Church will pass—as we all hope and trust she will—with renewed strength and influence into the new age—depends in my opinion upon her realisation of the nature of the Kingdom of God and of her relation to it, and to all those forces, social, political, religious,

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and intellectual which are either helping or opposing the Kingdom.

In this paper I have not dealt at length with critical methods and presuppositions, because had I so dealt with them, little time would have been left for the subject of the paper. Neither have I discussed the *pros* and *cons* for the various competing theories of the Kingdom—political and national, eschatological and apocalyptic, ecclesiastical and hierarchical, moral and spiritual, which are attributed to our Lord, on the ground that there are sayings recorded as His in the Synoptic Gospels, which make all these views His views at one and the same time. To fit into a consistent theory every utterance of the Synoptic Gospels about the Kingdom is a matter of great difficulty—nay, I believe that if these conflicting passages are to be taken in their literal sense as expressing our Lord's actual view of the Kingdom in every case, to harmonise them is not merely a matter of difficulty, but an impossibility. I must therefore explain very briefly my own presuppositions and methods in studying and interpreting that teaching.

First, I have assumed that, inasmuch as our Lord was a spiritual genius of the sanest type—I use this very modern and human way of speaking to make my point clear—it is highly probable that His teaching about the Kingdom was harmonious and self-consistent.

Secondly, it must have been profoundly

original. This, I conclude, not only from the contents of that teaching as we possess it, but also from the great impression which it made, and the general misunderstanding, disappointment, and opposition which it excited amongst His contemporaries.

I, therefore,—and in this I can claim to follow Harnack's rule—have tried to interpret our Lord's teaching about the Kingdom in the light of His most profound and original sayings about it. As for the other sayings about the Kingdom attributed to Christ by the Synoptists—I refer to those apocalyptic predictions which have not been justified by the course of subsequent events—if I find that I cannot fit them in with His profounder teaching, if I find, moreover, that they reflect very largely current contemporary notions about the Kingdom, either I am inclined to neglect them as not His; or, if His, as having become considerably modified in their oral transmission; or else I regard them as examples of current terms and phrases used by Him, not in the popular, but in a symbolical and spiritual sense. That some of Christ's sayings were altered under the influence of current religious beliefs can, I think, be definitely proved by a careful comparison of the three Synoptists. Any unbiassed reader of Sir John Hawkins' *Horae Synopticae* would be convinced of this. In any case, if these other sayings are attributed to Christ in their crudest form, and if they are

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interpreted literally, although they remain of historical interest as products of the Apocalyptic movement in Judaism, they have no ethical and philosophical value for the modern man, save in so far as they express aspirations, which to-day can be much better expressed in another form.

Just one more preliminary remark. I have not in this paper raised the question as to whether our Lord's view of the Kingdom underwent alteration as the result of His experience of the blindness, materialism, and fanatical nationalism of His nation. Some would have it that when He began His teaching, He shared the popular national Messianic idea, although in a more moralised form than did the nation generally, but that the circumstances of His ministry caused Him to spiritualise it. My objections to this view are :—

(1) That if the accounts of the Temptation in the Gospels of Luke and Matthew are authentic, they show that at the very beginning of His ministry, Christ's view of His Office and so of the Kingdom, was very far from being the popular one.

(2) The ministry was too short—perhaps only one brief year—to allow of any considerable alteration in His view of so fundamental a question.

(3) We have no clear evidence of such alteration in the records we possess of His teaching. His earlier as well as His later utterances recognise the spiritual character of the Kingdom.

“If,” as one has remarked, “any deepening spirituality can be traced in His (Christ’s) language as it proceeds, it is much more probably to be traced to his gradual instruction of His disciples in the profounder view, than to a gradual illumination of His own mind . . . It may well have been to them at the first hearing, difficult to realise that Jesus was enriching an old phrase with a new signification, and His bold use of traditional language may have been accepted by them as it has been accepted by many modern scholars.”¹

Plato tells us of the statue of a god found beneath the sea—a statue which slime had encrusted and sea-weed covered—and how it was rescued, cleansed, and purified, and set up again to inspire mankind with an ideal of divine beauty.

Our Lord’s profound ideal of the Kingdom of God has had, I venture to think, a history not unlike Plato’s shipwrecked statue.

In the Synoptic Gospels—the most reliable account which we have of our Lord’s teaching—there is no subject to which more attention is given than to the Kingdom of God. The phrase or its equivalent, the “Kingdom of Heaven,” occurs over one hundred times in these writings.

St Mark tells us that our Lord’s teaching began with it. His theme at the opening of His Galilean ministry was the Kingdom of

¹ F. G. Peabody, *Jesus Christ and the Social Question*. Sixpenny edition, pp. 39-40.

God.¹ St Luke tells us that our Lord's teaching closed with it. His theme during the forty days between the Resurrection and Ascension was the Kingdom of God.²

In the Synoptic cycle of teaching it is revealed in parables ; it is illustrated by symbolic actions ; it is set forth in direct proclamations ; it is the special subject of prayer. In short, it is the theme upon which our Lord taught most. Is there any theme upon which we have taught less ? We have taught about the Atonement—there is but little about that in our Lord's teaching. We have taught about the Church—it is only twice mentioned. We have taught about the lives of the patriarchs, the messages of the prophets, the examples of the saints, the value of Church ordinances—it is well, yet I can recall little of our Lord's teaching which deals with these themes. Have we ever preached a single sermon on the Kingdom ? Have we ever made a patient and laborious study of it in the New Testament ? Have we ever tried to think and work and teach and live in the light of it ? For years I accepted the usual hazy and conventional opinions about the Kingdom, and freely identified it with Heaven or the Church, or some particular aspect of the Gospel-message, according to the context. I did not identify it with an Apocalyptic Kingdom, which " did not come off," as Schweitzer had not written then. Indeed had I done so, I should not

¹ *Mark* i. 14, 15.

² *Acts* i. 3.

have felt any further interest in the subject. Had I been asked then to give an account of our Lord's teaching, I should probably have done what the writer of a recent article on *The Teaching of Jesus Christ* has done in a widely circulating volume. He treats the teaching of our Lord under ten heads. The first nine are explicit; the tenth is entitled, "*Other teaching of our Lord*," and in this section he refers to the Kingdom. What a disproportion is here, and yet it is a disproportion which we have in some measure inherited from the past.

II

Our Lord's teaching concerning the Kingdom has never been prominent in the Church's message since the days of the Apostles. When we turn to the Acts of the Apostles, we note that it is constantly mentioned there, but ecclesiastical history tells us that it was soon replaced by themes of greater current interest. Hence we find that it is hardly noticed in our creeds; it has never figured prominently in our great heresies and schisms; no patristic work of the first importance, with the possible exception of St Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*, has dealt with it. Three notable perversions of it have arisen.

First, there is Millenarianism—not in some ways unlike the view of our own "Fifth

Monarchy Men " in Commonwealth times—with its bright hope of an immediate earthly reign of Christ and the risen saints for a thousand years. This view even survives to-day in various forms amongst some of the smallest and most ignorant of the Christian sects, and a certain number of our scholars claim that this was not only the view of many in the early Christian Church, and one which, as we know, became generally discredited in the third century, but that it was also the view of the Kingdom taught by Jesus Himself. If that be so the teaching of Jesus about the Kingdom is merely a literary curiosity; it is of no practical worth to-day, except in so far as it indicates that our Lord's limitations touched the essence of His Gospel and not merely its form.

Secondly, there is Papalism, with its not unattractive conception of a Christian world-empire ruled by those who claim to be the ecclesiastical descendants of St Peter, and who usurp for themselves the sole possession of the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, of which it is recorded that our Lord spoke to that Apostle. This false view of the Kingdom has helped to divide Latin from Greek and Anglican Christendom.

Thirdly, there is Ecclesiasticism, which wrongly identifies the Church with the Kingdom, and so very naturally proclaims as its message: "Outside the Church there is no salvation"—*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. The effect of this view has been on the one hand to make the Church an

end and not a means, and on the other hand to veil our Lord's ideal of the Kingdom from the minds of men. Each of these misinterpretations and consequent misrepresentations of our Lord's ideal has not been without some advantages, as every student of history is aware, and yet one cannot but feel that they have produced more loss than gain to mankind.

III

But why should our Lord's ideal of the Kingdom have thus suffered corruption? We think of him who came and sowed tares amongst the wheat sown by the Son of Man. We remember, moreover, that the Lord forbade the premature rooting up of the tares lest the wheat should be torn up as well. When the harvest comes and the fruit of each is apparent, then is the time of judgment or separation and consequent destruction of the tares. This age is such a judgment time.

But let us ask our question again. Why should our Lord's ideal of the Kingdom have thus suffered corruption? And let us answer it this time in the light of history. The answer is not hard to find. Our Lord's ideal of the Kingdom was not easy for a Jew to grasp, although the phrase was familiar enough to the Jews of that period. Even the Apostles—Jews by birth—

who heard all our Lord's teaching about the Kingdom, quite failed to grasp its meaning during His ministry, as their question asked on the road to Bethany after the Resurrection clearly indicates—"Lord, wilt thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?"

To a Gentile the phrase would be new and therefore difficult. Moreover, the repeated use of the term "Kingdom" and consequently "King" would only too easily bring the Church into suspicion in the eyes of the Roman Imperial authorities as a treasonable organisation. We observe that one of the charges made before the Politarchs of Thessalonica against the apostles, is that they teach that there is another king (*βασιλέα ἕτερον*), who is in opposition to Cæsar. Be the cause what it may, the fact is clear. The mind of both Greek and Oriental Christians, due no doubt to the speculative atmosphere in which they lived, and to their innate love of philosophising, was soon turned from the ideal of the Kingdom of God to become involved in cosmological and Christological speculations; and the more practical mind of the Latin Church devoted itself with increasing intensity to questions of Church organisation and discipline, and of the nature and benefits of the Sacraments. Hence these two great ideals, "the Faith once for all delivered to the Saints," "the Church which is the pillar and ground of the faith," and at a later period, "the Bible which is the Word of God,"

occupied the minds of Christians, and although high views of these three things are by no means hostile, but rather helpful to the ideal of the Kingdom, yet the right relationship between them and the Kingdom was misunderstood, and the ideal of the Kingdom as presented by Christ fell into the background, and so suffered decay—nay, even corruption.

It is only of late years when the cry “Back to Christ,” or in its most modern form “Back to Jesus,” has become the watchword of an increasing number of Christians, especially students; and when the newer methods of thought and study are bringing new knowledge to light, that the ideal of the Kingdom is assuming a prominence it has never possessed since early Apostolic times, and men are beginning to realise better than ever before the nature of that ideal. Do not think that I am suggesting that Christ’s ideal of the Kingdom of God is becoming popular. It is too deep and spiritual for such a change as that to come about quickly. To receive and to teach the Kingdom as proclaimed by Christ, would entail, for many, a too revolutionary revaluation of current religious doctrines and institutions for it to come about easily, and it is, perhaps, only need—utter need—which will drive Christendom to accept it. It is only when Christians realise that our only possible hope for healing our divisions at home, and our only possible hope for steady and victorious advance

in our missions abroad, is to be found in Christ's ideal of the Kingdom—an ideal at once unifying and progressive—and in keeping that ideal before our own eyes, and the eyes of the world, that then the Kingdom will come once more to its own—as the supreme ideal of Christendom.

IV

But what was Christ's ideal of the Kingdom? The phrase was used in our Lord's day of the rule of God. The Kingdom of God over Israel, the Kingdom of God over Nature, the Kingdom of God over the nations, the Kingdom of God to be revealed in miraculous fashion from heaven—the eschatological apocalyptic Kingdom of God.

Now although for our Lord, the rule of the Father in Nature, in history, and in Israel, was ever manifest, yet He did not identify the Kingdom with any one of the prevalent conceptions of it. Moreover, where these prevalent conceptions were false and exaggerated He does not seem to have absolutely and categorically contradicted them, although His teaching was of such a character as to correct them. His hearers, however, did for the most part identify the Kingdom with the various prevalent ideas about it. For many of them it meant an Israelite kingdom to be extended over the nations by

force of human arms ; for others it meant an Israelite kingdom inaugurated by a heavenly Messiah and extended over the nations by miraculous means. The dominant view of the Kingdom, whether the means to be used in advancing it were human or superhuman, was thus national and materialistic. But our Lord continued to teach and yet no one seemed to understand. Why was this ? Because it is so hard to break away from some dominant and loved ideal.

Our Lord taught, the multitudes listened ; they listened with delight and profit, but much of His teaching about the Kingdom they did not understand. If they did not accept His teaching about the Kingdom in the popular sense, how could they accept it at all ? We cannot but think how disappointing much of Christ's teaching about the Kingdom would have seemed had they ever understood it. Perhaps that is why so much of it is mercifully enshrined in parables. How hard to grasp, how hard to retain, how unsubstantial and dreamlike, how unpractical and unsatisfying must Christ's teaching of the Kingdom of God have appeared to these people in the face of their national and materialistic ideals ! For the Kingdom of God in Christ's teaching is not national but universal ; it is not material but spiritual ; it is not visible but invisible ; it is not to be revealed from heaven with apocalyptic miracles at some future date, but is

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present here and now. *It is the rule of God in the human heart. The conscious, humble, joyous acceptance of the will of God, as revealed by Jesus.* Those who have accepted this rule have entered into the Kingdom—"theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

It is thus not the natural birthright of the Israelite, the hardly achieved privilege of the proselyte—it is open to men of every race and every clime and every age. It does not advance by the arms of patriotic Jews, nor even by archangels' swords. No celestial portents and heaven-sent plagues are to conquer its enemies. No external rewards, no spoils, no lands, no slaves, no extended empire, no replenished treasury, no beautified capital, no increased prestige, are to reward its citizens. It exists in the heart of the Lord. Thence it spreads from heart to heart. Teaching—the revelation of those moral and spiritual laws which are the will of God for moral and spiritual beings—is one great means of advancing it. Prayer and good example and the unseen influence of the Divine Spirit are other great means of its advance. Character and conduct are the badge of citizenship in the Kingdom. Its character is seen in the types portrayed in the Beatitudes, the humble, the conscience-stricken, the meek and disinterested, the merciful and pure in heart, the peace-makers, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness and patiently suffer for its sake. Its conduct is founded upon Love. Love is its ruling principle. Its laws are nothing

more nor less than the application of this principle to all the multitudinous affairs of men. Its ideal citizen is seen in the child—gentle, humble, pure, loving, trustful. Service is its badge. Its motto is “I serve.” He who first fully revealed its nature, said: “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

Service—the willingness to do anything or to be anything—to reveal its blessedness to those who as yet know it not—this is its peculiar mark. There is one other great characteristic of it—and may we not call it—its reward? It is its joyousness. Our Lord called His preaching about it, “the glad tidings of the Kingdom.” St Paul once described it as “love, joy, peace in the Holy Ghost.” Joy—the highest joy, which is experienced by all as they enter more fully into it—the joy of communion with God and of service for men.

What an ideal is this, which is the heritage not of the subjects, our Lord did not use that term, not even of the citizens, but of the sons of the Kingdom. This ideal, though during Christ’s mission its practical extension seemed to Him no larger than the grain of mustard seed—the least of all the seeds sown by the husbandman—should yet, He declared, become the greatest of all. Like leaven hidden in meal, it should in time silently and intensely penetrate the whole of human society. I may not describe it further.

V

How does this ideal of the Kingdom bear upon many current ecclesiastical doctrines and practices ?

The change involved in passing from their atmosphere into that of the Kingdom of God is, I venture to think, as great as that involved in leaving a city slum, or even a respectable suburb, to live upon a mountain top. It is not a change which can be made without effort or maintained without effort, and as one grows older, unless one's past life has been a very strenuous and steady development, such a change, should it have to be made, is not made easily. Or may I put the thought in another way ? Our statue is recovered from the sea, the encrusting shells are scraped off, the discoloured limbs are washed and polished. We take it to our temple, though other statues have left but little space in it for this one. We set it up, and then we find, with a shock of pained surprise, that such is its majesty and grace that all the other statues have to be re-arranged in subordination to it, and some it renders so crude and poor that they have to be removed entirely. Space forbids me to take the statues of many of our current ecclesiastical doctrines and practices, and re-arrange them in subordination to the statue of the Kingdom of God. Consideration for hallowed and sentimental associations forbids my indicating which of the statues would, in

my opinion have to be removed. Each Christian must think this out for himself and especially those who are in the sacred ministry of the Church. To review or restate our current religious doctrines and practices in the light of our Lord's ideal of the Kingdom of God is best done not in controversy and debate but in times of meditation and study.

Perhaps there are some who stand to the Kingdom of God to-day in a very similar way to that in which the Jews stood to the Kingdom in our Lord's day. I do not mean that they mistake their beloved nation and empire for the Kingdom of God. There are few who are so Erastian as to do that. But there are some who mistake the Church—the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church—for it, there are others who seem to me to mistake some favourite doctrine, for instance—that of the Atonement—"the finished work"—for the Kingdom of God—or rather they assign to their favourite doctrine a position of greater importance than they assign to the Kingdom. I am far from thinking little of the Church or of any of the great doctrines of the Christian Faith, but in the teaching of Christ, the Kingdom with its revelation of the Fatherhood of God comes first, and we shall do well to keep "first things first." Disproportion, wrong emphasis, unjustifiable exaggeration are "the wiles of the devil," by which Christian teachers are deluded and the salvation of mankind hindered and thwarted.

It is for this reason that I return to this thought of the Kingdom, for I would try to exhibit its practical worth in helping us in our work both at home and in the mission field.

First at home. The Kingdom as I have said, is not the Church. A prolonged and critical study of the Gospels seems to show that convincingly. Dr Sanday—one whose opinion we respect—writes: “The Kingdom of God is not the theocracy of the Old Testament, nor the eschatological Kingdom of the Apocalypses, nor the Christian Church of the present day, or of the Middle Ages, or of the Fathers.”¹

No, the Church is not the Kingdom. But let not that thought pain us. If we are not the rose, yet it is good to be near the rose. The Church is not the Kingdom, but she is in her Lord’s purpose, and she may be in actual reality the great instrument of the Kingdom.

This helps us to see the Church in her true light. She is not an end, but a means. Do we not sometimes forget that? Her Apostolic Ministry, her primal Sacraments, her Sacred Writings, are subservient to the purpose for which she exists; they, like her, are instruments of the Kingdom. Should they be the means of advancing the Kingdom, even at the cost of their own destruction, that were no cause for mourning. They exist to serve, and like those angels in the Rabbinical legend, when their service is achieved they may

¹ *Outlines of the Life of Christ*, p. 85.

gladly expire. What does this mean? Surely it means this, that they must be made to serve the purpose of their existence. If they prove ineffective in serving it; if they stand in the way of the advance of the Kingdom of God, their use must be either mended or ended. Why are we anxious to promote the union of the Church? Simply because we believe a united Church can best promote the Kingdom. Why do we believe in retaining her ancient and historic ministry? Simply because we regard it as a great instrument in advancing the Kingdom. But we may only contend for it in so far as it is capable of justifying its existence, by the doing effectively the work for which it was called into existence. The best argument for episcopacy is a good bishop. The best, the only, argument for the retention of an apostolic ministry, is that it proves itself to be apostolic in its love, in its wisdom, in its zeal, in its courage, in its power to overcome the world and to advance the Kingdom. If it cannot do that, if the schismatic spirit, if formalism, if ignorance, if sloth, if worldliness, if cowardice are its marks, then it will certainly be relegated to the world's great lumber-room, where lie the things that are lost to name and fame and use. So also with the primal Christian sacraments. They are not things to be disputed about, they are to be used to promote the Kingdom.

And this must be so with all the other things we handle in our Church work — our schools,

our clubs, our guilds, they are all subordinate to one great purpose—the promotion of the Kingdom. Let us never lose sight of that, so long as they promote that, they will exist, when they fail to do that, “God who fulfils Himself in many ways,” will fill other bodies, other men, other symbols, with His Spirit to achieve His purpose. Assuredly the revelation of God’s Will in history proves the truth of this assertion.

Again, this ideal of the Kingdom should surely help us to look with love and reverence upon all other instruments of the Kingdom. The instruments may not be the same as ours, they may be new and not old, they may be civil rather than ecclesiastical, yet in so far as they are advancing the Kingdom we shall regard them with friendly eyes, and assist and promote their welfare when and where we can. All emulation, rivalry, and bitterness, we shall strive to put away from us with all malice. This ideal of the Kingdom, if consistently kept before our eyes, if prayerfully realised in our hearts, can give a strength and calm and success and courage to our efforts which any narrower, lower, poorer view cannot give. Many of our ecclesiastical, social, and political problems melt away or possess comparative insignificance when seen in its pure and radiant light.

Moreover, the ideal of the Kingdom of God might achieve similar good results in the foreign mission field. Suppose that instead of going to the heathen with the vast and varied literatures

of the Old and New Testaments ; suppose that instead of going to them with the metaphysical subtleties of the developed Christian dogmas ; suppose that instead of going to them with the ordinances and institutions and organisations of the Christian Church, we went to them first and foremost with the Gospel of the Kingdom—with nothing less and nothing more than that. With no more dogma, no more practice, no more organisation than is to be found in our Lord's undoubted teaching of the Kingdom ; many of our present difficulties, many of our present divisions would pass away. When the Kingdom was realised in the hearts of converts, their teachers might then superadd, for purposes of keeping alive the ideal of the Kingdom, such dogmas, institutions and organisations as would best serve under their respective conditions to effect this, and therein they might no doubt introduce much that we find helps to keep it alive in our hearts, and also they might omit much. But the Kingdom first, always first, and only that which promotes it and nourishes it, second. Our missionaries would travel lightly then. To-day they carry too much *impedimenta*—the accumulations of the ages—to move fast. To-day they give even to their converts from heathenism plentiful examples of painful divisions and serious differences. To-day they are so circumstanced that their teaching often exhibits the maximum of intellectual difficulty with the

minimum of moral and spiritual power. If this ideal of the Kingdom could be got to dominate their spirits, their teaching, their methods, these obvious difficulties would be largely overcome.

Am I a visionary? Do I dream waking dreams? Is my statement false and exaggerated that the Kingdom of God was the main and foremost theme of our Lord's teaching? Is my definition or description of the essential character of that Kingdom untrue? Would not constant devotion to the ideal of the Kingdom in our Church-work, both at home and abroad, produce the effect which I have tried to foreshadow? Is it impossible that the Church, especially our English branch of it, should realise this ideal of the Kingdom? Every son of the Kingdom is an optimist. He knows that the Spirit of God can inspire with love, fill with wisdom, imbue with humility, energy and courage those who are loveless, foolish, and slothful.

May He grant the realisation of the ideal of the Kingdom in our hearts and in those of all our brethren, that God's Kingdom may come and His Will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

VIII

THE SCIENCE OF RELIGION AND THE RELIGION OF THE FUTURE

SYNOPSIS

There is among modern men a growing interest in the scientific study of religion. Three important conclusions arrived at by investigators.

- I. Religion is universal.
- II. Religion serves a necessary social function.
- III. All religions can be classified in an ascending order as :—(1) Animistic ; (2) Polytheistic ; (3) Founded religions. Christianity is in this third class, and its rivals are in this class also. Description of the only form of Christianity which can survive and exert an extended and extending influence.

VIII

THE SCIENCE OF RELIGION AND THE RELIGION OF THE FUTURE

ANY careful observer of the literature published during the last quarter of a century, will have noted the increasing number of books dealing with the non-Christian religions and religion generally, from the non-Christian point of view. In some cases these books are translations of the sacred literature of the various religions of the world like that magnificent series of fifty volumes of *The Sacred Books of the East* edited by Professor Max Müller.

In other cases they are monographs on particular religions like many of the admirable volumes which form the *Hibbert Lectures*.

In other cases the History of Religion, the Comparative Study of Religion, the Psychology of Religion and the Philosophy of Religion, are the subjects they severally undertake to treat.

Such books are appearing in large numbers in all the more progressive literary centres of Europe and America. The growth of this literature has been accompanied by the establishment of

professorships and lectureships for purposes of research and teaching in these subjects. Even International Congresses of students of religion have been assembled in different countries. But not the least interesting part of this movement has been the effort to popularise this knowledge, or at least to attract public attention to it, not simply by newspaper and magazine articles, but by public exhibitions, such as the Parliament of Religions at the World's Fair at Chicago, the Hall of Religions at the Orient Exhibition at London, the section dealing with religion at the recent International Exhibition at Brussels.

These facts indicate an increasing interest in the study of religion among educated people; but it may be questioned whether a merely superficial knowledge of it may not be creating an attitude towards religion in the popular mind which is prejudicial to the cultivation and growth of the religious spirit. Such an attitude would prove a calamity not merely to private but also to public life, and yet it is not to be met by deprecating the popularisation of such knowledge, although we may very properly deprecate some of the methods used. It is only to be met by imparting more knowledge; not, however, in the form of medleys of facts, for the most part disconnected and unexplained, but by attempting instead, to present them in their natural order and so in such a form as to exhibit the laws or principles of religion. It is natural enough

that a man when he first realises the great variety of religions, their many different practices and their conflicting beliefs, should adopt a somewhat contemptuous attitude towards their claims and the claims of religion in general. The memorable statement of the historian Gibbon about the various cults of the Roman Empire in the second century of the Christian era, that they "were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful," will thus seem to the superficial observer to be applicable to the religions of the world to-day. Thereafter there will be a great danger of his adopting what he regards as the philosopher's attitude towards religion. This attitude will not be due to his knowledge of religion, but to his having formulated some hasty and sweeping generalisation about it, or to his having adopted such a generalisation from some one else, which, whether it be true or false, he has no right to hold without further investigation.

To-day this study of religion is being seen to be more and more important for all teachers of religion, and particularly for missionaries—but even for those who are neither, it has its value. In the majority of cases it will cause its student to view religion not merely with interest but with reverence, even though he must recognise some forms of it as very inferior to others. Even should it never lead a man into close communion

with God, at least it may lead him to understand better the nature which he shares in common with his fellow human beings, and so bring him to sympathise with those fears and hopes and longings which through all the ages have had their home in the heart of man. If it does no more, it may help him to answer that question so poignantly asked by a modern French Archbishop—"Entre la religion unintelligente et le matérialisme brutal, âme poétique et pure, où serait ta place ? "

While it is perfectly true that those who know most of this Science of Religion would probably be among the first to acknowledge that there is much that remains to be done, yet there seem to be certain results attained so far, which may in a large measure be regarded as assured. Although it must never be forgotten that in science no door is completely and for ever closed.

I

The first, and by no means the least important of these assured results, is that Religion is universal. There is not nor has there ever been a tribe or nation of atheists—or perhaps it would be better to say—a tribe or nation without religion. This seems like one of those generalisations which must be examined carefully before it can be accepted. Professor Jevons deals with

it very succinctly as follows. "There never was a time in the history of man when he was without religion—is a proposition the falsity of which some writers have endeavoured to demonstrate by producing savage peoples alleged to have no religious ideas whatever. This point we have no intention of discussing, because, as every anthropologist knows, it has now gone to the limbo of dead controversies. Writers approaching the subject from such different points of view as Professor Tylor, Max Müller, Ratzel, De Quatrefages, Tiele, Waitz, Gerland, Peschel, all agree that there are no races, however rude, which are destitute of all idea of religion."¹

A generation or so ago this fact was not realised. This is not surprising. Travellers were too much inclined to judge of the religions of savages by the standards and practices of their own religion, and to assume that the absence of religious buildings and religious literature, of public religious rites and a recognised priesthood, denoted the absence of religion itself. A more intimate study of religion has shown that these tests are not infallible. There may be sacred places but no sacred building, sacred ceremonies as secret as the initiatory rites of a Greek "private mystery," a priesthood which is so ideal that every man is his own priest, or so degraded that it is disguised in the persons of the sorcerer or medicine man. As for the god or

¹ *Introduction to the History of Religion*, p. 7.

object of worship, he may assume as many forms as Proteus, who in the old Greek story kept on changing from form to form, in order to elude the grasp of his pursuers.

If, then, religion be universal, it becomes for any "being drawing thoughtful breath" something which may not be ignored. Such an one may regard it in the light of Goethe's saying that, "That cannot be an evil which is universal," or he may suppose that it is due to some general defect in human nature, or to some condition of humanity which he hopes time and favouring circumstances, especially education, may remedy—but whatever be his view of its nature and effect, he will feel that as religion is a fact which cannot be denied so it must not be ignored. It is thus something which every one—whether as an individual, a social reformer, a politician, an educationalist—must reckon with for good or ill. Let us not forget that.

II

Another assured result upon which there is a very general agreement is that religion serves a necessary function in every developing society. Any observer of the history of Western Europe during the Christian era could not fail to note the great part that religion has played during that period.

Fixing his gaze upon the Inquisition, the Wars of Religion, the attitude of many of the religious authorities towards the Renaissance, he may be inclined to exclaim with the Roman poet—*Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum*. Such a view, however, would be merely superficial; it would be like an observer of a volcanic eruption condemning the existence and action of volcanic forces as an unmitigated evil, little realising that volcanic eruptions are a very small by-product of the functions which volcanic forces for the most part invisibly discharge, and that these functions are not only useful but needful if this planet is to be habitable.

No book has probably done more to enable modern Englishmen to realise the part—a part at once vast and beneficent—that religion plays in human society, than Benjamin Kidd's *Social Evolution*, which went through nine editions in one year (1894). The author in examining the conditions of human progress—a progress as he justly remarks “strewn with the wrecks of nations, races and civilisations . . . pushed aside by the operation of laws which it takes no eye of faith to distinguish at work amongst us at the present time,” marks with keenest interest the “religious systems which fill such a commanding place in man's life and history.” “What,” he asks, “is their meaning and function in social development?” He replies that “they serve a great conservative purpose by subordinating the

interests of the individual units to the larger interests of the longer lived social organism to which they belong." He even goes so far as to assert that since man "became a social creature his progress ceased to be primarily in the development of the intellect." The intellect is very important, but it is not "the prime factor." "Natural selection . . . is evolving religious character in the first instance, and intellectual character only as a secondary product in association with it."¹ His conclusion is this, that the winning sections of the race are those in which, *cæteris paribus*, the religious type of character is most fully developed."² This is a very momentous conclusion, but it is not possible to weigh here the arguments by which it is reached. A cursory glance at history seems to support it. Where religion decays and with it that morality, which is ever associated in some form or other with religion—for we must remember that religion provides "those ultra-rational sanctions for conduct" from which it cannot be divorced—where this decay sets in the society itself rapidly crumbles. Perhaps that is why it is said that "all religions are equally useful to the magistrate"; perhaps that is why the charge has been made that "it is to the interest of the State to be deceived in the matter of religion"; perhaps the ruler who acts on this principle is like Caiaphas when he prophesied, really wiser than he knows.

¹ Page 307.² Page 308.

Cicero, whom Bacon quotes with approval, is in harmony with the modern social evolutionist when he thus addressed the senate of Rome. "We may admire ourselves, conscript fathers, as much as we please; still, neither by numbers did we vanquish the Spaniards, nor by bodily strength the Gauls, nor by cunning the Carthaginians, nor through the arts the Greeks, nor, in fine, by the inborn and native good sense of this our nation, and this our race and soil, the Italians and Latins themselves; but through our devotion and our religious feeling, and this the sole true wisdom, the having perceived that all things are regulated and governed by the providence of the immortal Gods, have we subdued all races and nations."¹ The whole British Empire thrilled when Rudyard Kipling struck the same deep note in his *Recessional*.

But what has been said of the importance of the part which religion plays in social development is equally true of it in art and literature. Religion has inspired the masterpieces of our noblest eloquence, poetry, music, and architecture. A Goethe, a Ruskin, a Matthew Arnold will be found asserting this, not as lovers of religion, but as lovers of the beautiful.

The Science of Religion is not concerned with considering the part which religion plays in preparing man for a life with God in the company of just men made perfect beyond the tomb,

¹ Bacon's *Essay Of Atheism*.

it is concerned with observing the facts of life in this world. It notes the part that religion plays and has played in the history of the development of humanity, and it declares that on the whole this part has been needful and beneficial. The question, then—not only for the religious man, whose motive is primarily different—but also for the lover of his kind, the reformer who desires social amelioration, the moralist who desires high principle and devotion to duty, the patriot who places the welfare of the nation above the life and welfare of any one of her sons—it becomes for these the most serious of questions. What ought to be my attitude towards the religion of my nation? What ought the religion of my nation to be? All religions are not suitable to all kinds of civilisations. With religion as with men there is a struggle for existence. Some can live in certain environments, some must die. Moreover, some religions promote human development, others retard it. That religion which best promotes all-round development ought to be selected, and the religion that will do that is the religion that can best develop and preserve the qualities of reverence, self-control, devotion to duty, and that unselfishness which will subordinate personal interest to the general good.

III

A third assured result is this, that the whole of the religions of mankind are found after examinations to fall, roughly speaking, into three great classes which can be arranged in an ascending order.

(1) The lowest class of religion is *animism*. Perhaps one of the best definitions of this is given by a writer who has lived among believers in it for many years. Herr Warneck writes: "Animism is a form of paganism based on the worship of souls. Men, animals, and plants are supposed to have souls; and their worship, as well as that of spirits of the deceased, especially ancestral spirits, is the essence of a religion which probably is a factor in all heathen religions."¹ Animism is very often limited, however, to the belief in the possession of souls by inanimate objects such as trees, stones, springs, etc., and the worship of them. Perhaps the Shinto Religion of Japan is the best example of animism surviving on a great scale. Animism thus includes *totemism*—a term derived from the North American Indians—and confined to the worship of animals. Animism also includes *fetishism* or the adoration for his own personal benefit of the spirit supposed to exist in some inanimate object, which is owned by its worshipper.

(2) The second class of religion is *polytheism*

¹ *World Missionary Conference*. Edinburgh, 1910, vol. iv. p. 6.

—the worship of many gods. These gods may be the personification of various functions and processes—the tutelary deities of domesticity, of war, of agriculture; or they may be the gods of different tribes or localities, which have become united by conquest or by some other means. These gods, all of whom have personal names, are then arranged in a pantheon under the headship of one great god, the deity of the dominant tribe or of the capital city.

Euhemerism may be regarded as a form of polytheism. It is the name given to the worship of the spirits of men, usually kings and heroes, who have been raised to the rank of gods.

Animism, totemism, fetishism may all exist side by side with polytheism, and do in fact pass into it by almost imperceptible gradations. Nevertheless, polytheism belongs to a higher class of religion than animism.

(3) The third class of religions are *founded* religions or *positive* religions. Such religions are Islam, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism and others. These, as Professor W. Robertson Smith asserts, “did not grow up like the systems of ancient heathenism under the action of unconscious forces operating silently from age to age, but trace their origin to the teaching of great religious innovators, who spoke as the objects of a divine revelation, and deliberately departed from the traditions of the past.”¹

¹ *Religion of the Semites*, p. 1.

Behind these positive religions lies the old unconscious religious tradition, the body of religious usage and belief which cannot be traced to the influence of individual minds, and is not propagated on individual authority, but forms part of the inheritance from a dim mysterious past. This latter class of religion is often distinguished from the founded or positive religions by being called *customary* religion. The characteristic of the founded religions is not that they are monotheistic ; they may be that as is Islam ; but they may be dualistic like Zoroastrianism ; or pantheistic like Buddhism—their distinguishing characteristic is that they have a personal founder. These founders, truly great and good men—dissatisfied with the prevailing tribal and local religion, put forth new and nobler ideas of religion. Disregarding the distinctions of tribe and locality—which the older religions observed—these men established a type of universal religion by making their appeal to the like-minded of every place and nation to organise themselves according to those dominant religious and moral principles which they were revealing to them. It is at once apparent that Christianity is a religion of this type. That is, Christianity stands in the first class of religion ; in the rank of those religions which have been well called “ apotheoses of personality,” to distinguish them from animism, which is an “ apotheosis of nature.” But these founded or positive religions are capable

in the struggle for existence of annihilating all types of customary religion. An example of this is seen in the inroads which Islam and Christianity are making to-day on the animistic religions of Africa.

The great religious struggle of the future lies between these founded religions themselves. Already it is acute. Which of them is best fitted to win? Most of those students of religion who agree with Thomas Carlyle that religion will never die, would predict that of all the existing religions the future lies with Christianity. They would urge this not merely on the ground of its essential qualities. These are to be found in the character and ideals of Christ, of whom a recent writer asserts: "In Christ alone among men, we have faith without dogmatism, enthusiasm without fanaticism, strength without violence, idealism without visionariness, naturalness without materialism, freedom without license, self-sacrifice without asceticism, purity without austerity, saintliness without morbidity, a light which was too strong to dazzle, a fire which was too intense to flame."

These are the roots of Christianity but it is not the roots alone which will enable Christianity to win the world, it is its fruits. The roots are needful for the fruits, but mankind will for the most part judge of the tree by its fruits, and be won by them. It is not Christianity as we see it

around us to-day which is going to win the world in the near future. Many of the more thoughtful and experienced of missionaries are beginning to realise this. The World Missionary Conference of 1910 sounds that note when it asserts—"The success of the missionary enterprise depends in the last issue, not on numbers, nor on wealth, nor on organisation, but on the forces of the Spirit. What is needed is a living faith, and a living faith demands a living theology."

It is not a Christianity which includes within itself many of the practices and beliefs, which are characteristic of the lower types of religion, that is going to win the adherents of the higher religions. It is not a Christianity which is superstitious, magical, sectarian, inhuman, ignorant, selfish, slothful, cowardly that is going to make itself the religion of humanity. It is not a Christianity so feeble and mediæval, so fettered and enslaved, that it cannot retain the allegiance of the educated European, that is going to win the world. It is a Christianity as simple in its creed as is the teaching of Jesus—as plain as are the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the two great Commandments—a Christianity which in its practice seeks unfalteringly to reproduce in daily life the spiritual insight and consecration, the self-sacrifice and love, the humanitarianism and courage of its Founder. It is a Christianity which has

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abolished its slums, gathered in its outcasts, cast out its superstitions, healed its petty factions, and ceased to fear modern knowledge, which can and will become in no far distant future—the Religion of the Race.

IX

THE CALL OF FAITH

SYNOPSIS

- I. Life is a hopeless mystery, and nothing is real except the sensations of pleasure and pain, therefore enjoy yourself.
- II. Life is a hopeless mystery, but you have a soul to be saved. You can do this by a very moderate exercise of religious faith and obedience.
- III. Life is mysterious and painful, but it is also educative and joyous, if you use it as one possessed of a living faith. This faith is not credulity, or facile assent, or belief founded upon evidences, it is a pure, active, aspiring, courageous spirit.
- IV. Faith hears a spiritual call which demands voluntary obedience, unselfish exertion, heroic endeavour.

IX

THE CALL OF FAITH

STUDY of abstract questions, such as the investigation of the great problems of theology and philosophy demand, is apt to prove very depressing; for we soon find ourselves involved in intellectual difficulties of various kinds, and the probability of attaining satisfactory knowledge of anything except material things, or any full and final solution of the great problems of life, seems quite out of the question.

Wearied and benumbed, we wonder if God and immortality, good and evil, freewill and eternal life, have any existence at all: we wonder if they are aught else but fantastic illusions which by turns dazzle and torment us.

Now when we get to this stage there is a tendency for us to do one of two things.

I

The first is this. It is to reason with ourselves in this wise. Life is a hopeless mystery.

Nothing is real except the sensations of present pleasure or pain, and the knowledge by which the former can be obtained and the latter avoided. Act, therefore, so as to obtain the maximum of the one and the minimum of the other, and count yourself a fool if at the end of life you cannot feel that you have warmed both hands before its kindly but dangerous fires.

If we adopt this attitude we are found addressing ourselves in the words of the Book of Wisdom. "Come now, therefore, and let us enjoy the good things of the present, and let us use creation with the ardour of youth. Let us fill ourselves with costly wine and ointments, and let no flower of the spring pass us by. Let us crown ourselves with rosebuds ere they be withered, let none go without his share in our proud revelry . . . for this is our portion, and our lot is this."¹

Our pleasure will not, of course, always take this form. It will vary with the age and tastes and circumstances of each. *Trahit sua quemque voluptas*. Never forego it, that is all. To miss it, is to miss life. Unless you have enjoyed, you have not lived. The pleasures may be high or low, gross or refined. But the message of this ideal of life runs thus. Live in the present. Enjoy the present. The future is not yours, therefore it is folly to live for it. There may be a world outside the world of your immediate sensations, but you can have no certain knowledge of it.

¹ *Book of Wisdom*, vol. ii. pp. 6-9.

Enjoy, therefore, the things of sense and time, and do it now; this is a plan which is at once wise, practical, and pleasant.

II

The other attitude which you may adopt—especially if you are not naturally strong and sensuous—is this.

Everything is mysterious, but it is the will of God that it should be so, therefore accept it. Life, it is true, is full of problems, but why trouble to try and solve them? God has set a limit to human faculties, wherefore, then, trouble with eternal designs a mind too weak to compass them? God, it would seem, has given men certain plain commands, let us obey them, for there is only greater danger and pain if we do not.

Faith and obedience of no very exacting character may help us to escape these perils. Why give tedious thought to God's eternal purposes for mankind or how He is going to accomplish them? He is Almighty, and the responsibility is His. Cultivate therefore trust in Him, belief in His scheme of salvation as revealed in His Word, and rest in the finished work of the Saviour. These are the means by which we can pass through things temporal so as not to lose the things eternal. To these, therefore, let us yield ourselves. Theological and philosophical

speculation, historical and scientific investigation, critical methods and modern conclusions, have nothing to do with us. There are but two realities for us in the Universe—God and the individual soul. Let nothing come between them to disturb the trustful calm of the latter.

Now to my mind neither of these attitudes is satisfactory, though certainly the second is far better than the first. And I admit that the second may be the only practicable attitude for men in a certain stage of mental and spiritual development, but it is not, I would maintain, a right attitude for the religious teacher of to-day.

The first attitude is hedonistic and materialistic, and denies the reality of the moral and spiritual sides of our nature.

The second is fatalistic and individualistic, and denies to the intellect that scope and freedom necessary for its development and probation.

Each attitude is essentially selfish and unsocial; each is essentially unintelligent; each is essentially unheroic; each is essentially unworthy of such a creature as is man.

III

But it is not because these two attitudes are in themselves open to objection that I have dealt with them, but because there is, so it seems to me, an ideal of life which differs greatly from each of them. An ideal which, though it be trustful and

humble, is essentially fearless, active, aspiring, social, generous. It values all that this life can give, though in varying degrees, but it values the getting of these good gifts more than the gifts themselves. It frankly recognises that this world is a place in which effort, pain, danger, and death must be undergone by every one in it, but it does not count it a worse world on that account. Its attitude towards life is robust. For instance, it counts not absolute knowledge either of God or Nature or Man as of the highest value. It asks not to be given knowledge of this kind made up in neat parcels for immediate consumption, it rejoices rather in the privilege of wringing it out of things. It believes that God wills this. It asks not for everything around it to be harmonious and in perfect order, it rejoices rather in the privilege—by which it believes it becomes a fellow-worker with God—of putting things right. It asks not for immunity from danger, pain, or death—and though not courting them, it hopes to be willing to face them bravely—for it believes that life would lose its educative value if opportunities for courage, self-sacrifice, love, and faith were removed from it.

That life, moreover, would lose its hallowing mystery, its solemn impressiveness, its thoughts too deep for tears, if there were nothing dark and painful and inexplicable in it.

In short, that if it were not for these things men and women would be mere rosy-cheeked cherubs,

so complacent, so unthinking, so lacking in sympathy, energy, originality, sensibility, and, indeed, in everything that makes a human being really human—in short, so utterly useless and uninteresting as to be a grave reflexion upon the Being or process that brought humanity into existence.

Now it is this ideal of life translated into modern terms which is, I believe, thoroughly Christian. We know that recent writers — Nietzsche, Mr Garrod, and others—have complained of the lack of heroism and nobility in Christianity. One reason at least for their doing this, is that they have looked at only one side of Christianity — its submissiveness, and have even here identified fortitude (*ὑπομονή*) with long-sufferance (*μακροθυμία*).

But submission to the will of God is only one side of the Christian life. One does not suppose that God only brought us into existence merely that we might submit to His will. There was certainly another purpose in Creation, namely, the learning the Divine will—this comprises the enthralling search for truth; and co-operation with the Divine will—this comprises the strenuous exercise of virtue.

It is this latter aspect of our relation to the Divine will which is active and heroic. It demands that a man should be willing to throw away his life that he may carry it out, and it places at the head of its list of the damned—

all cowards.¹ Now faith is that quality which enables a man to achieve this ideal. The view which regards faith as another term for credulity—the faculty which enables one to believe what is untrue; or as the faculty which enables one to give a facile assent to dogmas and propositions set forth by religious or ecclesiastical authority; or the even more misleading view of faith as “belief founded upon evidence”—are all hopelessly astray. Faith is an active, responsive, courageous, aspiring spirit. It is not concerned with minutely balanced probabilities or with carefully calculated profit and loss accounts. It is rather a spirit which teaches a man to live as part of a great invisible universe, in which love, order, duty, courage, truth are the great realities. A universe in which God is the ideal, and the world of sense and time a mirror which reflects Him for the pure and brave, but distorts or hides Him from the cowardly, slothful, and materialistic. It is this spirit of faith which the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews eulogises. It sees evidence of its working in a long line of ancestors of the Hebrew race. It led these men, in obedience to the Divine call which it voices, to traverse unknown lands, to stand in splendid isolation against a world with different aims, to endure torture not accepting deliverance, to turn to flight armies of aliens, in short to do innumerable deeds which are

¹ *Rev.* xxi. 8; *cf.* 2 *Tim.* i. 7; *John* xiv. 27; *Mark* iv. 40; viii. 35.

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inexplicable and unjustifiable if we adopt a materialistic, or even, as it seems to me, a purely individualistic interpretation of life.

IV

The four points especially to be noticed in regard to the spirit of faith are these:—

(1) Faith hears a call. This call comes to us as the Voice of God, the Demand of Duty, the Vision of the Ideal. It is not capable of logical justification. If men are merely material creatures; if there be no God and Father, no eternal life—then the Call of Faith is a delusion.

But here is the difficulty—there is no way of proving to demonstration that such eternal realities do exist or do not exist, except by striving to live in relation with them. And so of Abraham—the father of the faithful—we read, that “he went out not knowing whither he went . . . for he looked for the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”¹ He had, you see, no “dead certainty” in view. He, like a brave and great man, took all the risks. To him, as Kipling describes in his *Song of the Explorers*,

“Came the Whisper, came the Vision, came the Power
with the Need,
Till the soul that is not man’s soul was lent him to lead.”

(2) Again, the Call of Faith is not such as to enforce obedience. It does not speak in accents

¹ *Hebrews* xi. 8, 10.

which we are compelled to obey, and so it may be ignored and neglected—and, indeed, it often is. We may pretend that its notes of inspiration, its calls to duty were never uttered, and the dulling influence of materialism will assist our self-deceit, for

“ . . . Whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close us in, we cannot hear them.”

(3) Again, the Call of Faith is social. Though they who obey the call are acting in obedience to the highest law of their being, yet they do not so act from a selfish motive. They do not flee from the City of Destruction simply to save their own souls, but because it is no fit city of which to be a citizen. Moreover, in their quest for the city that hath the foundations, they are supported by the thought that it is not for themselves alone, but for their brethren as well, that they have undertaken the task. Abraham obeyed the call that he might become the father of the faithful, through whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. And inasmuch as their quest is not selfish, so their reward is not selfish either. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews says of the heroes of faith, that though they gained the Divine approval, “yet they received not the promise, that apart from us . . . they should not be made perfect.” They then recognise, desire, and receive no reward which cannot be shared by their brethren. And so, as they pass on their

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way, their message is one of fellowship and encouragement :—

“Follow after, follow after, we have watered the root,
And the bud has come to blossom that ripens for fruit.”

(4) And lastly, the Call of Faith is for a man that is really human, the only call worth following. It is the call of his higher nature. It comes to him in the revelation of all that is good.

“Whene’er a noble deed is wrought,
Whene’er is spoken a noble thought,
Our hearts in glad surprise
To higher levels rise,
The tidal wave of deeper souls
Into our inmost being rolls,
And lifts us unawares
Out of all meaner cares.”

Of Abraham we read that he and his fellow-patriarchs were seeking a better country — a fatherland. A home in which their being had its origin, and in which alone it could rest. They have seen a vision of God and of man as God’s son, and they will follow it. In time nothing counts to them beside it. To follow it is the law of their being. Will they ever reach it? After a while they never ask that question. The ideal may be real, and it may be realisable; but, whether it be so or not, they scorn any ideal which is lower and baser. “The city that hath the foundations”—foundations in the spiritual and the eternal order of things. “The city whose builder and maker is God”—God from

whom man draws his essential being—it may all be such stuff as dreams are made of, they care not if it be so, for they can never persuade themselves that it is.

This they know ; it is their only fatherland. It is the only city on whose roll of citizens they will have their names inscribed. Its laws, its customs, its ideals are the only ones for them.

There is a celebrated passage at the end of the ninth book of the *Republic* which shows us that Plato was a citizen of this city as well as the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

“ I understand,” he replied, “ that he will live as a citizen of such a city. You mean such a city as we have described in every particular, but which is confined to the region of speculation, for I do not believe that it is to be found anywhere on earth.” “ Well,” said I, “ perhaps in heaven there is laid up a pattern of it for him who wishes to behold it, and beholding, to regulate his life accordingly. And the question of its present or future existence on earth is quite unimportant. For in any case he will adopt the practices of such a city, and of none other.” “ Probably he will,” he replied.

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